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THE PRESENCE OF GOD
IN HIS TEMPLE

C. J. VAUGHAN D. D.

**THE PRESENCE OF GOD
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THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN HIS TEMPLE

By C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

MASTER OF THE TEMPLE
AND CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO THE QUEEN



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I.

HEART-SILENCE IN THE TEMPLE- PRESENCE.

But the Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep
silence before Him.—HABAKKUK ii. 20.



THESE splendid words struck upon your
ears and hearts last Sunday. Under
the altered rule, which will come in with the
next New Year, they will not be heard again
in our Sunday Lessons till the year 1883.

Which of us will then be worshipping here
to hear them?

I would catch them to-day in their flight,
and make them our topic of meditation on
a day which I feel, which you feel, to be a
solemn one; a day of return hither to many;
the first worship, to many, after separation,

before a year's toils open, amidst all the mysteries of a still locked-up future, of which we know as yet this only, that we are in a world of change, of trial, of sorrow—that we stand between two eternities, of which the copula is this 'Now,' which flies and is gone as I utter it.

My brethren, this Church is in many senses our point, yes, our bond, of union. What know we, for the most part, one of another, save as fellow-worshippers here? We are not friends, we are not acquaintances, we are not neighbours. Gathered from all parts of a vast city—many, but for once, by accident or curiosity, from distant parts of a mighty country—we are united here, and (as to any visible union) here only, in this antique, unique, mystic building, wonderfully preserved through long centuries, in the heart of an inflammable, combustible Capital, to keep up the continuity of God's worship between a dead England and

a living. In this one place we meet, strangers by face, to exercise an intimacy of fellowship which belongs not to earth or time, such as we have not elsewhere with friend or brother. In the same degree must this be holy ground. In the same degree must the question be a grave one for all of us, how we *ought to behave ourselves in this house of God*, and the call a seasonable one, at each re-opening of this shrine for worship, to *put off the shoes from the feet*, and to leave the world behind us on that threshold; in short, to ponder the meaning for us of this grand old saying of the Prophet, *But the Lord is in His holy Temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him.*

There is a mystery about the age and the history of this Prophet. Like all to whom God's highest ministries have been entrusted—most of all the ministry of prophesying—he is a Voice rather than a Person. The whole

interest of him is centred in this—that God, having something to say to us, was pleased to say it to us by him.

There is an ambiguity also in much of the prophecy. It is usual to see in this chapter a character, and a very dark and repulsive one, of the Chaldeans. I venture to doubt it. *What things soever the Law saith*—and the Law there spoken of includes the Prophets—*it saith to them that are under the Law*: else it would minister not to correction, but to self-righteousness. It seems rather as though the sins of Israel, of God's Church and nation, were pourtrayed in these five glowing denunciations—sins of selfishness, and covetousness, and rapacity, and lust, and idolatry; in contrast with which, the last more especially, is set finally the revelation of the august, solemn, sacred Temple within which God dwells, and outside which, as though in its cloister, porch, or vestibule, in the awful hush

of that conscious Presence, all the earth is bidden to keep silence.

I will not spend this precious half-hour in any disquisitions, however interesting for the study, upon the scenery of this portrait, upon the setting of this gem. It is quite plain that the subject is Reverence.

O earth, earth, earth, be silent before God in His Temple! There is a silence which befits the very precincts of God's Temple. The knowledge that He is there, within that Temple, should make earth herself silent before Him.

We must not limit the word Temple, even as regards the writer, to any one place or building, such as the House of God in Jerusalem. Those who see only the Chaldeans in the context might see only Jerusalem in the text. They might read it as a boast of Jewish patriotism over the inferiority of other local worships to their own. The dumb stone,

laid over with gold and silver, has no breath and no life within it : but the Jehovah, whom Israel worships, has breath, has life, has invincible strength—let all heathendom tremble before Him. But this would be to do an unjust despite both to the Prophet and to the Dispensation.

The royal builder himself was too well-instructed to suppose, or to leave the most ignorant of his subjects to suppose, that God can be thus confined within any the most sacred or the most mysterious building. *But will God*—he asked of himself, and answered it, at the Dedication—*will God in very deed dwell on the earth ? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee ; how much less this house which I have builded ?*

And more and more, as the purposes of that preparatory and parenthetical system unfolded, was the idea of God's Temple carefully distinguished from the material earthly form.

At length the sublimest of all utterances burst from the lips of Isaiah: *Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the kumble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the Prophet*—and the quotation from their own Scriptures cost the intrepid martyr his life—*Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?*

Thus there was an entire harmony of tone and voice between the Old Testament and the New, on the two primary subjects, of the universality of the Presence and the spirituality of the Worship. Let the Church of the Gospel beware that she recede not, through

any charm of eye or ear, through any seduction of voluntary humility, or any hope of a readier access to the heart or fancy of the multitude, from a vantage-ground of faith and knowledge which Isaiah, which Amos, which Habakkuk, which Malachi occupied!

We read of temples in the Gospels, in the Epistles, in the Apocalypse—but what temples? Not the aisles or the chapels, not the chancels or choirs, of Churches and Cathedrals: if it had been so, we should have gone backward, not forward, in religion, as type became antitype, and the lamp of night flickered and faded into the sunlight of day. Temple, under the Gospel, means, in its distinctive use, one of two things—either the temple of the Church, or the temple of the Man.

Certainly God has other temples. Nature is a temple. This universe of earth, and sea, and heaven—if it were not a temple, in virtue

of God's perpetual indwelling—if we were not justified in recognizing His presence in the phenomena of wind and rain, of production and growth, of order and change, of life and death — would dissolve and collapse in a moment. In that temple God is: well may earth itself keep silence before Him.

And certainly Christ Himself, as He stood upon earth in our likeness, as He returned into heaven, bearing that nature still, is the Temple of God in a sense at once distinctive and exhaustive. *Destroy this temple*, He said, *and in three days I will raise it up*: and *He spake*, the Evangelist adds, *of the temple of His body*. For in Him, St Paul interprets, *dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*.

Because Christ is God's Temple, therefore—such is the mystery of godliness—therefore are we:

And that in two ways. St Paul gives us both of these in one Epistle.

First, he says, addressing the Church. *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?* He is arguing the responsibility, the perilousness of ministering, from the sacredness of the ministered to. *If any man defile—or destroy*, for the word is the same which follows in the antithesis—*if any man destroy*, by antichristian teaching, *the temple of God, him shall God destroy* in the fire of His coming judgment: *for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*

Yes, my brethren, it is not the place, it is the congregation, in which God dwells. *God is a Spirit*, and in spirit, not in matter, He dwells. Because ye are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ—because ye are members of that body, in which, by promise and by inheritance, the Spirit of God lives and moves and influences and sanctifies—therefore ye are God's Temple. Oh, believe me, it is no disparagement to the most venerable of holy places,

to say that it is not the Temple. Copied it may be from the Church of the Sepulchre—consecrated it may be by the worship, superstitious or pure, of some five and twenty generations of English Churchmen—it is not, itself, the sanctity of this presence. *Whether is greater, the building, or the congregation which consecrates the building?* The Holy Ghost dwells not in shrines made with hands: it is ye, men of flesh and blood, yet spirits and souls also full of immortality—it is ye, who are the sanctity of this place; you bring it when you come, you carry it away in your departing.

No one will imagine that in thus speaking we detract from the true dignity and glory of this famous house of our worship. That it is set apart as the gathering-place of souls—that, if it be not, it contains, the Church—this surely is reason enough for its reverence. But let us place the matter on its true ground. It is not because God is in the wood or in the

stone, but because God is in the worshippers, and because they are here to worship—therefore it is that we shall apply the text to this gathering, and say, *The Lord is in His holy temple : let all the earth keep silence before Him.*

The Patriarch *awaked out of his sleep, and said, Surely the Lord is in this place ; and I knew it not.* Would to God, my brethren, that something of the same awaking might be granted to us this day ! I know that there is order here, and decency, and attention : I know that all is solemn to the eye, harmonious to the ear, suggestive of calm reflection, pious thought, sincere devotion : yet I know too, not by report, but in conscience, that what God calls reverence, what God calls worship, is not, in all, present. There are hearts echoing my word as I say, in sorrow and shame, that the Lord may be in His Temple and earth not keep silence ; that in this gathering of souls to-day there has not been that absolute abstraction from other

thoughts and desires and memories, which is the first condition of reverence. There have been voices in the soul's ear this day, and therefore in the ear of the soul's Divine Inmate, not of heaven, not of eternity, not of Christ and the Spirit. Alas! there are oftentimes here these two opposite things at once in our worship—a silence of heart from prayer and praise, and a noise, an uproar, of heart from other, from worldly and sinful sounds—so that in both ways God is dishonoured; alike by the silence and by the sound His holy Temple, the Church, is profaned, is defiled.

Oh, it is not an easy thing—let none deceive himself with the thought—to *keep silence* where God is.

You will say, we ought not to be silent. *Whoso offereth praise*, we remember the words, *glorifieth me*. *Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, the Apostle bids us bring these, and make melody therewith in the congregation.

It is so. And we know not that the Service can be too beautiful, too winning, too lovely, with which we praise Him from whom all gifts, as all graces, flow. These things are not the disturbers of that silence which the text prescribes. The Divine Psalmist himself, when he wrote, under God's inspiration, his Hymn-Book for the Church of all time—and handed over his compositions, one by one, to his Chief Musician for instrumental as well as vocal melody—yet begins one of his Psalms with the clause, as the margin gives it, *Praise is silent for Thee, O God, in Sion*. He recognized the experience, so true to the inner life, that the loftiest praise is at the same time the deepest silence; that, as praise is not thanksgiving but adoration—not the rehearsal of benefits, but the admiration of God—the contemplation of, and losing oneself in, that which He is in Himself in His love, and in His light, and in His glory, seen in the face of Jesus Christ—so the

highest praise is that in which the absorption is the most complete, and the soul most entirely hushed in that sense of the Presence which is all stillness and repose and *fulfilment with benediction.*

Impossible as it is to express the thing felt, inadequate as words must be to breathe thoughts which lie too deep for any, yet I am persuaded that you feel, with me, that this heart-silence in the temple-presence is the want of our souls; that for lack of it our worship has never reached what yet we are conscious of as its goal, and that we promise one another, here in this day of re-gathering, to struggle after it more earnestly than before, and never, never to acquiesce in any counterfeit of it or any substitute.

Each endeavour after it is blessed. Each resolute *keeping of the foot* and *bridling of the tongue* as we come hither and hence depart; each firm checking and crushing within of the

rising levity and worldliness ; each stern refusal, uttered inwardly, to entertain this recollection of yesterday's pleasure—this plan, this arranging and forecasting of to-morrow's business ; each outcry of the inward man for the grace of spiritual silence ; each upward look of the soul towards an invisible Temple and towards a Divine mercy-seat ; each honest, grave, serious effort after a reverence of spirit which is a consciousness of God—will have its sure recompense of reward. At last, even on earth, we may hope—yes, in God we may hope—to know something of that worship in sight of the Invisible, from which we shall pass, by a less violent or less impossible transition, into the seeing Him face to face.

The other Evangelical Temple is the Temple of the Man. Not of the Church, but of the Christian, were those companion-words of St Paul written, *Know ye not that your body is a temple—yea, the temple of the Holy Ghost*

which is in you? The other was a warning against an irreverent ministry: this is a warning against an irreverent life.

The Lord is in His holy temple—and the Temple is the Man. Mystery of mysteries! yet Christ Himself says, *Marvel not*. Marvel not that He who made *fearfully and wonderfully*, says the Psalmist concerning the bodily frame—*fearfully and wonderfully*, we echo his words as we gaze upon the yet more intricate, more delicate, more fragile mechanism of conscience and of the soul—marvel not that He who made should be able to visit, to inspect, yea, to enter, and to in-dwell.

Marvel not that He who hath given such power to men, that they can intrude themselves into all but the innermost, most secret soul one of another—unto companionship, unto influence, unto blessing or cursing life-wide and life-long—should have reserved to Himself the like access; should be able even to

touch the spring of being, and cast in at the very head of the waters the healing, life-giving power. Marvel not that He who hath taken upon Him to deliver man, should work thoroughly, work mightily, and *to the uttermost*—filling the empty house with Himself, and thus consecrating that heart which was a *cage of unclean birds* into the very temple and sanctuary of His Spirit.

The Lord is in His holy temple—and that temple is the man. Then *let earth*, let dust and ashes, *be silent before Him*. Oh enter, brother, sister, that *little sanctuary*—a Prophet calls it so—which is within thee for perpetual devotion. Let the *silence* begin there. Expect not to find in the Temple of the Church a reverence which thou seekest not in the Temple of the Soul. Feel—thou mayest—that God is there, and that the Temple of God is holy. Say to Him, Though I see Thee not, hear Thee not, have no sense or touch of Thy presence,

yet, Lord, Thou art here—here as the Creator, here as the Redeemer, here as the Sanctifier! *Lord, I believe: help Thou mine unbelief!* Lord, give me Thy grace of the heart-silence in the temple-presence! Thou art here—reveal Thyself! *Thou that sittest between the cherubim, shine forth!* Stir up Thy strength, and come and save! Suffer me not to drown Thy voice, or to profane Thy dwelling! Speak Thou—and make me silent! Hush the din of earth, that I may hear Thee speak, and live! At evening, and at morning, and at noonday, oh speak with me as I kneel! And not then only. Keep alive in my soul the sense of that Presence! Keep alive in my business, in my refreshment, in my rest, and in my rising, that priceless spirit of reverence which is the consciousness of God! Suffer in me, O God, no counterfeit, no phantom, no ghost, of the true! Help me to silence within every rival, every antagonist voice! Grant that I may strike

dumb the lying suggestion which calls evil my good! And when, as this day, the voice is in mine ear, *All things are ready: come to my Supper: This do in remembrance of Me*—be the will not wanting! *The Lord is in His holy temple*—the aggregate of the soul-temples is the one temple of the Church. Whosoever hath God in him, let him come to partake of God! Let him come, in the silence of awe, in the silence of love, in the silence of adoring, admiring praise, to eat of that bread, to drink of that cup, which is the communion of Jesus, and to give himself to be His wholly, His only, His for ever, in that union which is the soul's rest, in that love which is life eternal!

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,
November 5, 1871.

II.

THE APPREHENSION OF GOD A SPIRITUAL EFFORT.

There is none . . . that stirreth up himself to take hold of
Thee.—ISAIAH lxiv. 7.



HE world has a year, and the Church
has a year.

The world's year is in part natural, in part capricious. It notices the seasons, yet scarcely follows them. Its arrangements are those of convenience. What the world looks at, in these matters, as in all matters, is self-interest. Trade and commerce, money and business, order its year, and echo the cry, which needs no echoing, Live for time—hazard eternity.

The Church's year is independent of the world's; follows another order; has a system,

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a rule, a method of its own—and ends to-day. Her voice, small and still by comparison, vocal only to the wise, is raised, or scarcely raised, in the midst of earth's restless din, saying, Time is short—life is a dream—think of the soul—live that other life, secret yet real, in which God is all, and which Christ, the Son of God, came and suffered and died to make real, and to make possible, and to make delightful, to every sorrowing, sinning, suffering man who has a heart in him, and a conscience, and a soul—a sense of want, and an aspiration after the beautiful and the strong and the holy.

It is not fanciful—it is true—to see this office of the Church in her very Calendar. Here, five weeks before New Year's Day, the Church is solemnly closing and re-beginning. *In the world, not of it*, is written upon her Almanac. Very striking is it, to hearts capable of such thoughts, to enter one of her homes of worship on some dark November week-day morning,

and find a handful of devout men under her guidance praying and giving thanks, making mention of the first Advent and the second, carrying on a soul's work and recognizing God's presence, while the world is busy buying and selling, fastening upon itself more rigidly, more immovably than ever, the yoke and the gripe of things that are seen. And so when we see the Church calmly ending her year and beginning her year without asking what the world does—guiding her course by the rising and the setting and the immortal re-rising of the Sun of Righteousness—there is something of Divine admonition in the independence: like her Master, she has meat to eat, and a message to deliver, and a work to do, which the world knows not of: and, not in cold isolation, not in heartless self-complacency, but in meekness, and in tenderness, and in love, she will say to the passer-by, she will say to the most thoughtless alike and the most sin-bound,

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We are going to the place and the rest which God hath told us of—come thou with us—let thy soul, with us, eat and be satisfied.

I feel this to be a solemn day—this close of the Church's year—this turning back again to the beginning—this gathering of fragments that remain, ere a year's thankless waste be irrevocable, irretrievable, for ever. There must be one thought uppermost to-day—Oh for grace and power to give it utterance !

The text will do this, if God opens it. It will tell us our want—it will tell us how to supply it. It will tell us why we have not—it will guide us to seek and to receive. *There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee.*

A Prophet writes—writes by inspiration—else we might think the phrase too bold, half irreverent. It brings back the earlier words, not of Prophet, but of Patriarch, *I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me.*

To take hold of God—yes, when we think of it, this is man's want. The apprehension of God. God is a Spirit—and yet He can be taken hold of. God is in heaven, and thou upon earth—yet the hand can be stretched out from earth, and it shall grasp One in heaven. Mysterious, every word of it. Yet I say that there is an echo to it all in these hearts, in these souls.

The apprehension of God—of Him in whom already *we live and move and have our being*—of Him whose we are, in such sense that we can neither will anything against His will, nor execute any purpose without His sustaining—yet who is, to most of us, an idea, not a reality—an abstraction, not a Person.

When we read of Him, or hear—when we enter the Church, or kneel down to pray—does it not seem as though no One were present, or no one save the bystanders, whose presence is but too real? Have you not, in the Church or beside your bed, gone through a

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form of good words, professing to be a series of confessions, prayers, praises, intercessions, and yet never felt as though they either reached any one, or even left the dim, dull, puzzled brain which was trying to articulate them into devotion? And when you have risen from such worship, have you not again and again risen disappointed—saying to yourself, I suppose it is proper, right, necessary, to discharge this duty; but, as to anything gained from it, I might as well have spent the time in reading, talking, or sleeping?


If this be the prayer, what shall the life be? He who feels not God present when he prays, how shall he set God always before him when he is at work, when he is in business, when he is in society? God must be apprehended sometimes, ere He can be realized always: surely the 'sometimes' must be in acts of devotion, before the 'always' can be the experience of the life.

Who does not feel that, if he could only take hold of God, his life would take a new colour? Who would not give his all—yes, with however low an opinion of human nature as an existing edifice, I have a very high idea of human nature in its touching pathos, in its picturesque beauty, in its capacity and its promise, as a ruin—I say, therefore, as my high yet just tribute to the humanity which has survived all these centuries of fall and demolition and decay, Who would not give his all, at this moment—who would not part with his money, with his rank, with his pleasures and his vices—if he might but, once and for ever, take hold of God—find Him for his Friend, find Him for his Companion, find Him for his shield and his exceeding great reward?

And when for a moment, once or twice in your life, you have caught a distant, faint, evanescent glimpse of the reality of God;

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when, in some season of distress and desolation, you have seriously and earnestly said to Him, *I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory*—fill this void, people this solitude, rest this weariness, satisfy this unsatisfied love, with Thyself, as a real, living, loving, and present God; and the prayer seemed to be heard, and there came a voice to you from the excellent glory, *It is I*—here am I—thou art mine, and I, the Almighty and the All-loving, I, even I, am thine; was there ever a moment so bright in memory, so thrilling in its enjoyment, as that moment? Was it not worth, to you, volumes of evidence—did it not draw you, as with what the Prophet calls *the cords of a man*, that is, of human sympathy instinct with Divine strength, to come again and yet again to that converse and to that communion, as to something real, and strong, and satisfying, beyond any earthly sweetness or any human love? That moment showed you



what the life of God is in His devoted and loving ones: that moment, with reverence be it spoken, gave you some idea what heaven will be to those *who shall be counted worthy to obtain that world*, and to find there how the presence of the entirely loved, of the perfectly loving, is a thing not measured by time, not conditioned by action, but just the enjoyment of an absolute felicity, drunk in at every pore, and satisfying every faculty and every capacity of the being.

But the saying before us is, that this *taking hold* requires a *stirring up*. It comes not to any man unsought. And as there is a *stirring up of the will* on the part of God, for which we have prayed in the Collect for the day, so is there also, the Prophet says, a *stirring up of himself* by the man, without which the apprehension of God will be, to the end, impossible for any.

The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence,

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and the violent take it by force. There is a sort of insistence and persistence, of resolution and determination, of spiritual boldness taking no denial, by which alone, our Lord teaches us, the kingdom of God can be won. *Violence* is His word for it—and though the expression needs interpretation, it must not be explained away. God must be *taken hold of*, Isaiah says; and to take hold of God, a man must *stir up himself*—must waken every dormant power, and rouse his whole being into vigorous vitality.

We shall see this by example. And if the examples be homely, earnest hearts will forgive.

A congregation is assembling for worship. Singly, or by two and three, they approach, they enter, they find place and room. Their professed object is to do what Isaiah speaks of—to *take hold of God*. The building is called God's house. The meaning of the open doors, of the tolling bell, of the preparation of the

books, of the gathering of the people, is, that it is the hour of Divine Worship. Now therefore everything must depend upon the mind and will of these men. They are about to *take hold of God*. Not only to see Him at a distance, as He might pass by in a procession, or seat Himself on a throne; as a Prophet beheld Him once in vision, *high and lifted up*, the Seraphim around and above Him, while the train of His robe filled the temple. Not thus. Christian worship—indeed all true worship, whether under one Dispensation or another—is not mere contemplation, though this is a high and great thing, but contact—the taking hold spiritually, by faith, upon One who is a Spirit, and who, being such, is on that very account not less, but more, suitable for contact with that *spirit of man which is in him*, the noblest part of him, and the one alone in question.

A man who knows what worship is, why he

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is here, Who is present, will feel that it is mockery, that it is profanity, not to *stir himself up* for such a meeting. But Isaiah says, *There is none that* does so. His people, his generation, were not wickeder than other nations or generations. He does but express in strong passionate language, of poet and prophet, the extreme rareness, in all times, of that self-arousing which he declares to be preliminary to the taking hold. His words are as true as ever—the necessity, alike, and the rarity, of this *stirring up*.

My brethren, it came to my knowledge—by an accident which I can scarcely regret, if it enables me to minister more pointedly to the need of my fellow-worshippers—that, in this Church last Sunday morning, in the brief pause before the Service, an audible conversation was carried on—fatal to the comfort of serious people around, condemnatory as to the devoutness of the persons themselves—concerning

every common, commonest topic of the week's business and the week's news—without reserve, without embarrassment, without any apparent consciousness of the indecorum, the indecency, of the act. And I do believe that the fault lay, not so much in the particular act, as in the whole idea and conception of worship. However decorous the subsequent conduct—and it was most decorous—there could have been no feeling, in those hearts, of the solemnity, of the responsibility, of the meaning and purpose, of the work in which we are here engaged. So difficult is that work—by far the most difficult, I will venture to say, in which the mind of man is ever, anywhere, occupied—that no one can intelligently, reverently, devoutly, enter upon it without forethought, without preparation, without the concentration of every thought and power upon the thing which he is about to do. If the apprehension of God is the thing proposed,

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there must be a self-wakening, what St Peter calls a *girding up of the loins of the mind*, going before.

That which is true of worship is true of prayer. We pass from the Church to the chamber, and we place ourselves in thought at that spot at which we are accustomed to offer our secret prayer. St Paul has a word for prayer, which gives a deep insight into what he made it. He calls it a *conflict*. The idea may have come to him from Jacob's night-long *wrestling*—interpreted for us by Hosea, who calls it a *weeping and supplication*. At all events, it marks the struggle, the combat, the contention, the stretch and strain of every mental and spiritual energy, without which prayer cannot be; such prayer, I mean, as drew down upon Apostles of old those great and manifold gifts of grace to which England, like other lands, owes her Christianity. St Paul must take hold of God, and therefore St

Paul must first, when he would pray, stir up himself.

My brethren, no man knows anything of the secret dealings with God of his brother's soul. But one thing each man knows—his own. And it is a strange thing, yet true, that no man can speak, seriously and sincerely, of any spiritual experience of his own, without finding an echo in the ear, in the heart, of his hearer. *As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.* On this profound saying rests the whole work of preaching.

Now, when we pray, whether the circumstances of the moment be common or exceptional, whether the feelings be depressed or joyous, the one only object must be, to take hold of God ; to apprehend Him as our Father and Saviour and Comforter, and to bring Him back with us into the life.

Consider then how this can be done.

With what earnestness, with what self-recol-

lection, with what realization of the Presence, with what a locking of the doors of the mind against worldly thoughts, with what a gathering up of wants and sins, that we may bring them to God for supply and healing, ought we to preface and prelude that kneeling down! Many of us, in confessing, confess nothing real. We use strong words, but the tale has little meaning. Sweeping self-accusations, violent, vain, and void, are easily found in books, and lightly adopted: but from such phrases the residuum of thought and feeling is almost nothing. Look back upon the past day, recall one single wrong word, word of uncharitableness or irreligion, which escaped the door of your lips—tell that, tell it just as it was—you will have done more than a thousand vague words could have done for you, towards an honest heart-opening in the sight of God. Be true, be real, at least there. Collect the things that you have done, and spread them as they

are, naked and bare, before the throne of grace. Ask for them, as they lie there in sight, your own sight and God's, the promised forgiveness in the name of Jesus. Believe that it is yours, and you have it. Go forth as forgiven, and you shall show it. Men shall take knowledge in you of the Presence; and you will begin to love what Ezekiel calls the *little sanctuary*, in which—in the shrine of your own heart—in which, for you, *God's honour dwelleth*.

There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee.

Is it so? Must we continue and end thus? Do we not wish to take hold of God? Do we fear that contact?

For want of it life is dark, and duty difficult, and sin triumphant, and death formidable, and judgment terrible. For want of it we grope in darkness, amidst unrealized truths, and unmeaning forms, and unrelished privileges, and unsettled peradventures. For want of it we are

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lonely, when we might have a Friend closer than a brother; and perplexed, when there is within reach for us the Light of life that would enlighten every man! For want of it, religion is for us a gloomy, repulsive, negative thing—when it might be a presence, a companionship, a joy, a life!

Determine, my brethren, in the strength of God, that another year, another Advent, shall not find you thus dull, thus lethargic, thus half-awake. God loves acts; acts of the life, testifying sincerity—acts of the soul, pledging to earnestness. God loves that refusal to let Him go, that following hard after Him in the daytime, that wrestling with Him in the night-watches, that preventing of the dawn in crying, that confidence in His attention, in His intention of love—which has been the mark, in all ages, of His elect. Postpone not, into some undefined future, that apprehension of Him which is eternal life. Expect it, seek it, pur-

pose it, instantly. Not in God, but in yourself are you straitened. *Stir up* yourself, and you shall *take hold* of Him.

My brethren! the stirring up and the taking hold are, alike, secret things. We live in an age of exertion, of activity, of unrest. In our time, surely, that prophecy of Daniel is fulfilled, *Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.* This activity, this unrest, affects religion. Men would work upon masses. And it is well. Let them try. God prosper them. It is enough to make any man try anything, to live in this London! to see the misery—to see the want—to see the sin—to see the multitude!

But this I say, that then only will gregarious effort have been successful—and I believe that they who try it feel this—when it has touched the man, the personal life, the life lived in secret and in the sight of God.

Yes, the voice of man has great power, and

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the sympathy of man—and most of all in the things of God.

Yet the stirring up, and the laying hold—these two things must be in the soul, between it and its God.

Therefore carry the matter, yourselves, into that Presence. Be alone, be alone—even in multitudes—with your God. For each, as for all, Jesus died and rose. Only through each can all be gathered.

Give yourselves first to your God, to your Lord—then, then only, shall you be strong to influence.

*Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God,
Thou God of my salvation—*


*Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways :
and sinners shall be converted unto Thee.*

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,
November 26, 1871.

III.

THE ACCESSIBILITY OF CHRIST.

The Lord is at hand.—PHILIPPIANS IV. 5.

HESE five words—three in the Greek—have in them the whole weight and strength of two, of three, Advents.

The Lord is near—

(1) By Incarnation. He who dwelt from eternity in the light unapproachable, came nigh, entered the world, dwelt among us, yea, was made man, and in that Human Nature lived, died, lives again, never to be divided from it, never to be sundered from the kindred, from the family, from the brotherhood of us who wear it, even for ever and ever. Even upon earth it is

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said of Him that He was still in heaven : even in heaven it is said of Him that He is touched with our infirmities, yea, that He can feel with us.

The Lord is near—

(2) In accessibility. Whosoever will may set Him before him; may have Him at his right hand; may dwell in His presence; may feel after Him in his soul's darkness, and find Him for his very life's light. There is no dividing continent, no severing ocean: there is no journey, nor voyage, nor flight to be taken: no wings of dove or eagle are wanted for the escape or for the soaring—*the Lord is at hand*: desire Him, will Him, and He is yours: speak to Him, ask of Him, converse with Him, and He hears, He listens, and He will do it.

The Lord is near—

(3) In self-presentation. There is an Advent still in the future; that great Coming, or Presence, on which Prophets and righteous men

of old dwelt so fondly, as the grand refreshing, restitution, emancipation, regeneration, which shall repair the breaches, build again the ruins, compensate the sorrows, wipe away the tears of ages and millenniums of fallen humanity, and bring in that new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth, only, perfectly, everlastingly, righteousness. This mixed and mingled condition, this confused and tangled state, this world and Church in one, this sin and grace intertwined, this flesh and spirit warring, this life and death carried about in one body, shall not, cannot, be for ever. Christ, glorified already in heaven, must be glorified also upon earth. Revelation says that this shall be by a Coming, by a self-presentation of Christ Himself on the Church and on the world—let the scoffer ask as he may, *What has become of the promise?* let the Atheist ask as he may, *Where is the God of judgment?*

It is not certain which of these three Ad-

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vents—Incarnation, Spirit, or Presence—which of the two last, certainly, St Paul had specially in his view when he wrote this sentence from Rome to Philippi.

The heart of the Church has culled out of the Bible many choice sayings for eucharistic recollection. Out of no one book, certainly out of no book of four chapters, has she selected, treasured, cherished more than out of this brief Epistle.

St Paul, a prisoner now for Jesus Christ, keeps ever warm at his heart the thought of his absent friends and his distant Churches. Philippi was a bright spot in his memory. There first the Gospel planted itself in Europe; passed from the contemplative East into the busy, practical, working West; tried its hand, so to speak, upon civilization, upon organization, upon commerce, upon society; and was found, in that one earliest lodgment, equal to the emergency—equal, in other words, to the

task proposed to it, the bringing God, God in Christ, into the very heart and life of mankind.

St Paul loved Philippi with all the love of that great heart. Nowhere perhaps ever lived quite such love—in any heart save one—and that one excepted heart was not only human.

There, in his prison, he is praying for these Philippians; trusting, hoping, rejoicing, expecting; telling them his circumstances, his feelings, his thoughts; calming their anxiety for him by the remembrance of God's blessed alternatives—perhaps life, and that is well—perhaps death, and that is better. Only let his life, only let his death, be cheered by the knowledge of their constancy and their consistency. Then he will grudge nothing. Then, if he be even *offered upon the sacrifice and service of their faith*, still he can joy, still he can rejoice with them.

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One single care seems to have obtruded itself upon the otherwise perfect serenity. Most instructive is it to us, who dwell so contentedly with ten thousand sins. He feared lest there were among them something of selfishness; lest perhaps the self-sacrifice, the self-forgetfulness, of Jesus Christ, were not fully reproduced in them; lest there were still room amongst them for self, and, if so, as its inseparable shadow, for disunion and discord. Two Christian women—their names here written, for once, upon the truthful as imperishable page—are, he hears, at variance. Wonderful love! flashing, not by electric wires, but by a sympathy more quick and more responsive, from Rome to Philippi in space—from the 1st century to the 19th in time—the admonition to forget, to remember, and to be at one!

And so enters the text; embedded, as it were, in these real, these practical, because personal directions.

Rejoice in the Lord alway : again I will say it, Rejoice. Let your gentleness—let your forbearance—be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing ; but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all (every) understanding—which rises into a region above mind ; rises higher and penetrates deeper than any intellect, however keen, or practised, or profound—shall guard, as in a fortress, your hearts and your thoughts in (inside) Christ Jesus. Christ is the fortress : and the peace of God, that tranquillity of the soul, at one with its God, which satisfies all longings, and so precludes all roving and all disaffections, is the officer who keeps alike heart and thought within Him.

I have glanced thus at the context, which has been our Anthem to-day and will be our Epistle next Sunday, because I think that it

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justifies the application of the text to the second topic suggested in the beginning—the accessibility of Christ. *The Lord is at hand* for these *requests* which are to supersede anxiety.

It will be obvious what thought is in my heart to-day. Yet, before I give utterance to it, I would lay a deep foundation in the revelation here before us.

The Lord is at hand.

We speak not now of the imminence of the Second Advent. We speak of that accessibility which is the product of the First.

St Paul presupposes, as an experience of life, the existence of circumstances, inward and outward, which will become anxieties, if they be not anticipated by prayer.

There is nothing to which we can refer so confidently in this place as the sense of want. A congregation of men and women ‘fulfilled’ with their hearts’ desires would be a spectacle either unprecedented or most sorrowful. For

it must be a congregation either of *just men made perfect*, or of persons fed to the full with portions of this world.

No : these hearts are for the most part still restless. The thing is out of sight, or in dim shadowy prospect, which would make you happy. Success, fame, wealth, love, a home securely built below, or else (happy they who ever dream of it) a home above *that cannot be moved*—these, this, you have not. For want of this you are an unsatisfied man. You do not pretend even to yourself that you have no sense of want. God is testifying within you at this moment that He, He Himself, is your Rest—and you have not Him.

Then it is to you that St Paul, dead eighteen hundred years, slain with the sword because he believed it, ministers to-day—*being dead, speaketh*—and says to you just this, *The Lord is at hand*, and therefore *be careful for nothing*. No man need be anxious any more. Go to Jesus

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Christ, or (which is the same thing) to God through Jesus Christ, and tell your want. Turn it into a *request*. *Make it known*, is St Paul's beautiful human way of expressing it—as though it were not known till the man tells it. You are unhappy about a life—your own, or another's: you are unhappy about a soul—your own, or another's: carry it in your hand, carry it in your heart, and go and wish that life, wish that soul, into the ear of Christ, of God.

Surely an infallible antidote—surely an absolute panacea—for the anxieties of this being! Surely, if this be true, a man must be a fool, must be a madman, must be a suicide, who goes on still in his misery! *The Lord is at hand: then be careful for nothing.*

So simple, so self-evident, to St Paul, was this principle over which thousands and tens of thousands stumble. Which is right? Was St Paul—that large-minded, that lion-hearted man, that man of strong prejudices conquered,

that man of a life's course reversed, that man once *breathing out threatenings and slaughter*, now glorying only in the Cross of Jesus, finding in it the crucifixion of his sins, finding in it the consecration of his powers, finding in it the satisfaction of his aspirations, living and dying to make it the life of other lives and the stay of other deaths—was St Paul—you see what it made him—you cannot pretend to say that there was no strength in him, and no loftiness, and no beauty—you can scarcely pretend to account for it at all by the cant phrase 'enthusiast'—was St Paul, I say, right, or is the infidel right, the one in saying, *The Lord is at hand*; or the other in saying, *Christ is dead, and not risen?*

For myself, I had rather be an enthusiast with St Paul than be sensible with the infidel. Not merely because I wish St Paul to be right; not merely because it would be a great comfort to carry all my requests to an

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Almighty Friend; not merely because all is mysterious about me, and one mystery more is not worth straining at; not merely because a motive of gratitude, real or imaginary, is strong and sweet, and a life lived upon it is likely to be at least a life of love—but because I feel that here is a phenomenon which it is irrational to leave unaccounted for; because I see here facts which seem to me to admit of but one explanation; because I do not see that men can at their will, of their own mere motion, change themselves into these beautiful, these glorious characters; because I count it reasonable to hear what such a man says concerning the means by which he became what he is—and if I find that he says it was by faith in Christ, I hold myself bound at least to try his method, until I find some one else to whom I can go, who has, as Christ has not, words for me of eternal life. *The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing.* If I have a distress, if I have

a doubt, if I have a perplexity, if I have a trial or a disappointment, I will carry it to Him. If a painful letter reaches me, I will, like King Hezekiah, *spread it before the Lord*. If I have a wish very near my heart, I will at once test it by its capability of being prayed, and resign it into the hands of God by praying it. *The Lord is at hand*—in accessibility.

This last has been a memorable week. Never, surely, in living memory, has the heart of this nation of England been more profoundly moved. Other sorrows have been over the irrevocable: we scarcely knew of the illness ten years ago, till it was a death. Then we sorrowed—it was too late to pray. Now, we have been gathered round, we have been hanging over, the bed. A week surely to be much remembered! It has taught us many things. It has taught us that, over and above the life of self, around and beyond the life of family, there is a corporate life—which is, a national. Men had begun to

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say, We are ripe for a Revolution; for a Republic—‘What is that?’ Men had begun to say, We are tired of this bauble, a Crown—we are tired of this pageant, a Court—we are tired of this expence, a Family of Princes. This week has refuted these sayings. We are not tired of the Throne. We are not weary of its necessities, actual or prospective. If the loyal heart of England could have framed its prayer rightly, it would have said this—Give us a dangerous illness—avert from us a death. So shall we value our privileges. So shall we learn to give thanks out of the same loyal heart, and say, *Thou hast not dealt so with any nation!* Other peoples shall look on and wonder at the loyalty, at the fidelity, yes, if they will, at the old-fashionedness, of England! God save us from playing at Constitutions—from trifling with Revolutions—from trying Republics!

This week has taught us more. It has taught us that, underneath all speculations, all

conjecturings and imaginings about religion, there lies a rock of faith which we shall dig to if we are compelled. We cannot tell who prayed, and who prayed not, this last week, for the precious life assailed and jeopardied. But we know that prayer was recognized, was resorted to, as the last hope of despairing man. We know that from Unitarian chapel and from Jewish synagogue there arose to the God of life and death the same prayer, in substance, which went up from this Temple. It was a tribute to the Creator, faithful and prayer-hearing. It was the cry of Humanity to its Parent, nearer and tenderer and more observant than *the fathers of our flesh*, who yet heed our necessities. Cherish in your hearts that instinct of the created—sorely will you want it, or sorrowfully will you miss it, in the cloudy and dark day!

And the prayer is heard. We know not, it would be presumption to speculate, how much

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prayer had to do with the gladdening issue. Enough for us to know that God evoked the prayer, and that God granted the blessing. Leave it to others to ask, How if the prayer had been restrained? how if the arm of flesh had been relied upon? We see this only—that the same God who purposed the result commanded the means. Peradventure neither medicine alone, nor prayer alone, had been sufficient: God willed the union and the co-operation.

But, my brethren, now that reflection is possible, as it was not possible a week ago—now that things may be said, in plainness of speech, as in tenderness of heart, from this Pulpit, which one week ago might have jarred upon ears and hearts overstrung—I will put to you a question or two, praying your attention, your pondering, and (in God's ear, not in mine) your answering, as to your prayers and your intercessions that have been—as to your duties and your responsibilities, growing out of

those very prayers and intercessions, in the future.

I will ask you first, Did you pray?

Are you quite confident, and why, that your prayers for the Prince of Wales ever left your own heart—ever entered the presence-chamber of the Most High? Were they prayers, or were they wishes? I know that you wished the Prince's life—did you pray for it? You will say I am suspicious—of course you prayed. Pardon me—but answer. There is a difference between a wish and a prayer. The difference lies here. All prayers, worthy of the name, are wishes—but all wishes are not prayers. A prayer cannot be more clearly defined than as a wish breathed in the ear of God. Did you then realize God when you prayed? Did you feel that He was here, and you before Him? Did you first believe that He is, and is that He is? And did you ask Him for this life, as having power over it? If you have listened to

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the sophistries, I might say the philosophies, of the day, I am quite sure that you could not. If you have learned to believe that human life, inward and outward, goes by law—rigid, inflexible, hard-hearted law—law which binds soul and body, law which is supreme over God Himself—then it was impossible for you to pray for the Prince's life, because you knew in your heart and in your soul that God Himself could not give it you!

I hope you will have seen, this week, that Nature is too strong for theory. It may be a blessing to you for life, to have discovered that, when the heart of a man or of a nation is deeply stirred—when a man is shipwrecked or drowning—when a nation is threatened with the loss of its firstborn son—something within says, There is a God, for all your philosophy—and He is *a very present help in time of need!*

You prayed—but for what? Just for the life? for the continuance of this breath? for

the preservation of the young husband and father, of the probable heir of a mighty throne? Did you thus prescribe to God the thing He should give you, and was this thing all? Said you nothing about the soul, hovering between death and life, and, if recalled now, so to hover again, one day, without recall? Said you nothing about that washing from sins past, of which the public prayer spoke—about the precious, the immortal life, threatened with an instantaneous judgment? And was there no ‘if’ in your petition—nothing which made mention of the nature of that prolonged life for which you interceded?

History, ancient and modern, tells of two sovereigns—sovereigns of least enviable renown—begged back, in their youth, from dangerous sickness, by the prayers of heathenism or of superstition; and of subjects living to curse the prayers which had recalled them. God avert the omen! God endue this young Prince—so

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beautiful in manner, so courteous in presence, so kindly in feeling, so sensible in idea, so capable in business, so affectionate in his home—with every virtue and every grace which can adorn the character, as with every blessing which can give dignity and lustre to the reign! If I even breathe the thought to which I have given utterance, it is but to bespeak your prayer for that which is more than life, and to remind you that, in praying now for the life, you bind yourselves by a solemn pledge and vow to pray henceforth for ever for the soul.

Soon, if the progress of the recovery be what present signs prognosticate, the common prayer for the Prince and for his House will become again as monotonous, as formal, as dull and dead as aforetime. I know how it was with the prayer for our Queen. Ten years ago it was prayed in every Church, in the first days of her widowhood, with tears and fervours of sympathy. Who can tell how many blessings have

been withholden from us as a nation, by reason of the coldness, the indifference, the wandering, with which we have begun again to pray for her? Now, once more, the response is earnest, is heart-deep, when we pray in this place, *O Lord, save the Queen*. God grant that there may be something left behind of the anxieties that we have this week shared! that we may feel more deeply upon how slender a thread our national blessings hang; how much is wrapped up for us in that household; how intimately we are all concerned, down to the humblest home in the United Kingdom, in the life, in the example, in the leadership of one Person in the generation; how speedily virtue and vice rise and fall, are emboldened or abashed, according as one Person encourages or affronts either! Pondering these things, we shall learn a truer, a deeper lesson than many Sermons and many Services can teach us. We shall have learned that they

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who seek God in prayer on emergencies must, if they would be true men, seek God always; that they bind themselves, as they would shun ingratitude, as they abhor hypocrisy, to set God always before them—viewing every relation of life and every particular of action in the light of truth and eternity, and striving to bring every thought into captivity to the will and example of Jesus Christ.

There are those—we know it, and we thank God for it—upon whom the anxieties of the past week have taken this effect—that the experience of the Divine Presence, as that which is the natural home of the sorrowing and heavy laden, attracts them towards it for abiding habitation; and the spending (as it were) of one night with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration draws from their souls the cry of adoring admiring love, *Lord, it is good for me to be here*: Lord, I will dwell in Thy tabernacle for ever, and my trust, for life and

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for death, shall be in the covering of Thy
wings!

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT,
December 17, 1871.

IV.

THE WORD BEHIND, SAYING, THIS IS THE WAY.

A word behind thee, saying, This is the way.—
ISAIAH xxx. 21.

TWO gifts of God are distinguished in this prophecy. One is for the eye; the other is for the ear. One is in front; the other is behind. *Thine eyes shall see thy teachers. Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee.*

There is one thing common to the two promises. Both offer guidance. Both imply the blessedness, both presuppose the desire, of being guided. God Himself can open to the sincere person no greater happiness than that of right guidance.

To the sincere. And to them only can God speak. To the double-minded there is a special call, but it is of a preliminary kind. Cleanse your hearts, that God may speak to you. He cannot deal with you as you are, save in judgment. You will misread, mishear, misunderstand everything that God says, till you are in earnest. When you are—when the Advent call has found you out, *Sinner, prepare to meet thy God*—then you will ask in good earnest, *What wilt Thou, Lord? What shall I do? Where and what is eternal life?* and you will count yourself the happiest of men in that day, if the twofold promise should unfold itself to you—

Thine eyes shall see thy teachers—

Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying!

It is with the latter that we are concerned now. There is something mysterious in that *behind thee*. It will bear pondering. I think

66 *The Word behind, saying,*

that it distinguishes the wanderer from the steadfast. The *teacher seen* is the director. He is in front of the wayfarer, guiding the steps. He is in time to prevent error; to say, *This is the way; keep it, and you will find life.* The *word behind* is the voice of the corrector—following the straying footsteps, and bringing back the right-hand or left-hand rover into the way of peace.

Guidance itself, Divine guidance, has two parts, two aspects, two functions and offices, towards His people. The one is the office of direction: the other is the office of correction.

Which want we, my brethren? which of the two guidances—the teacher in sight, or the word behind?

For us, indeed, here assembled on the Eve of Christmas—muffled up before men with our secrets of life and our mysteries of soul, but before God, each one, *naked and open*—direc-

tion and correction are practically one and the same: but, if we are asked and must answer, I know you will all say—

For me, for me, the word behind !

Direction is for the saint, correction for the sinner.

A word behind thee, saying, This is the way.

The possible voices are many.

(1) There is the voice of inclination, saying, *This is the way.*

What harm can it do, just once, and just once more, to indulge passion, to give the rein to self-interest, to ambition, to vanity, to folly, to lust? Does not every one so?

(2) And there is the voice of indolence, saying, *This is the way.*

It is irksome, it is intolerable, to be always on the stretch; to be looking narrowly, pedantically, at each thing as right or wrong, as safe or perilous, as a duty or a sin. Surely, surely, there are many things of neutral colour;

neither this nor that; words, enjoyments, actions too, which God has mercifully left to us unsaddened, unsoured, by the religious question. At all events, life is short, and pleasure shorter: and there will be sickness, there will be sorrow, there will be old age, there will be death, to make these subjects less distasteful, more congenial: therefore for the time I will take my fill of that which is—I will say to the monitor of eternity, as Felix said to-day to St Paul, *When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

(3) And there is the voice of unbelief, saying, *This is the way.*

All is uncertain — Revelation, the Bible, Jesus Christ most of all. It is unsafe to take that way, the way of simple faith, of humble trust, of personal love to the Invisible One. I will show thee a way, which, if not all that thou desirest, is yet enough for thee; the way of duty and morality, the way of kindness

and charity, the way which must be part of the right and may be the whole of it. Walk in that. Yes—quoting Scripture, as usual—*do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God*: visit the fatherless and widow, and keep thyself unspotted from wickedness—and thou canst not be lost; thou mayest (even if there be a Christ) be saved for thy well-doing.

This is one of the voices: and thousands listen to it, and walk for a lifetime in dim darkness, when Christ is offering them the very daylight of God.

(4) And there is the voice of custom—the world's, the Church's custom—saying, *This is the way*.

Be quite sure that, whatever fanatics and enthusiasts may tell you—however they may for a time vex and convulse consciences, or even galvanize mind and life into a temporary revolution of being—it is always the middle course, the creed and practice of moderation,

which has the truth and will prevail. Be with the multitude, not of the godless or profane or licentious, but of the respectable and regular and religious—and you must be safe. Shun extremes, stand on the old paths, and there will be, for you, few regrets and no remorse.

(5) And then, once again, there is quite another voice in your ears, different from all these, the voice of a new-old teacher, saying, *This, this is the way.*

You are weak, and ignorant, and a child. You cannot study the Bible for yourself, so as to draw from it its hidden secret. You cannot expect to see where wiser men have been blind. You cannot expect to decide, where great men, mighty men, saintly men, have differed. Resign your intellect, your judgment, your conscience to me—and I will guide you. I am the voice of the Church; speaking the wisdom of the first and purest age—ere yet Christ was divided, or heresy had intruded itself into the bosom of

infallible truth. I will undertake you. I, represented by some priest of the Church Catholic, will direct, correct, discipline, guarantee you. I will receive your confessions. I will minister your absolution. I will apply the requisite medicine, of the wounds, and the blood, and the Passion, and the Cross, of Jesus. That which you cannot do for yourself without infinite risk—that which God Himself does not for you, save through the Church—you shall thus have from me, in its purity, in its comfort, in its certainty, in its strength. This is the way, walk ye in it.

Brethren, we speak that which we know. These are among the counterfeit voices, more specious or less, which are bidding for your souls. God forbid that we should confuse or confound them one with another—as though there were no difference, in these matters, between the voice of selfish passion, and the voice of idle worldliness, and the voice of re-

ligious earnestness. Still we cannot think that any one of these is the very thing spoken of in the text. God help us to apprehend it! It is, might we but grasp it, the life and the light of men.

We have erred and strayed—this very verse says so—to the right hand and to the left. And God promises *a word behind us, saying, This is the way.*

There are many lesser, lower senses in which He fulfils it. And they are all true fulfilments, unless they be divorced from the one, the all-embracing.

1. Providence itself is oftentimes such a word behind us.

How often have we fallen into some snare of the devil—laid for us in evil companionship, laid for us in worldly connection, laid for us in bosom sin—and we were entirely captivated and captured. We lay, at uneasy rest, in the thing that was wrong; we loved it, or we

acquiesced in it, or we despaired under it : and it would have held us fast till this hour ; but God interposed—prepared one of His strong east winds, or one of His insignificant worms, of which the Bible tells, and smote our gourd, or let the sun beat upon our head : either satiety, or fickleness, or treachery stepped in—perhaps a fever, perhaps a death—the snare was broken, and we were delivered. Then we began to see and to loathe ourselves in our own sight. Why ? Because the word was then at last audible behind us, This, this is the way—the way of duty, and therefore the way of peace.

2. Conscience is one of these words behind us. More often, perhaps, than it is the teacher seen. St Paul himself—we heard it this morning—found it no easy matter to keep his conscience always in front of him. He says he had to *exercise* himself—the original word is that which gave its title to asceticism ; it ex-

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presses a perpetual practising and disciplining of the whole life, the whole man, unto obedience, unto godliness—to have always an un-stumbling conscience, a conscience which does not trip and fall over hillocks of guilty memory—such is the figure—as it reviews and sits in judgment upon the thing done, the history that is of the past.

Conscience, even in the faithful, is too often a word behind—reproving rather than guiding. Yet even thus it is one of God's words. Yes, through it chiefly are all God's words spoken. Conscience is the self-knowledge, the self-privity, which tells me what I am, and of what sort that thing is. Conscience, taught of Christ, is the very word of words as to duty. Even heathen moralists and satirists could tell of its retributive lash; could write startlingly, thrillingly, of its force as a word behind. Often has it been God's first voice in the man, preparing him for Christ; saying, *This is the*

way, and in this way without Christ thou canst not walk.

3. Pre-eminently, predominantly, is the Gospel the word behind us. How often in the night-watches has the face of the Man of Sorrows—stricken, smitten, crucified by us as for us—brought the conviction of sin into some hard heart! Surely it was the wisdom as well as the love of God—His *manifold* wisdom Angels call it—which devised that plan and scheme of the re-purchase! The Gospel of Jesus Christ ought to be, is in countless thousands, the teacher seen; the Cross itself the spectacle of persuasion and of direction. More often still is it the other—the conviction of sin unto correction of the sinner.

Surely, surely, there is a loving God, who gives energy and power to His Gospel. Every day, were the eye of this soul but open to behold Him, we should see signs and proofs of His working.

A few weeks ago—I vouch not for the particulars—I repeat but at second-hand, ignorant of names and dates, the fact itself, which yet I thankfully accept in its substance—a few weeks ago, at this Sunday Service, there entered this Church, as any common casual worshipper might do, a young creature in deepest distress and despair; so wretched, that she had resolved on self-destruction, and brought with her into this presence the poison which was to end life. The Service began. There fell upon her heart, with a meaning unfelt before, those words of the General Confession—which of us has pondered them to-day?—*We have erred and strayed*—yes, there was *the voice behind, when we turn to the right hand and when we turn to the left*: presently there was the pleading cry—and then the tears could not be restrained—*Spare us, Good Lord, spare Thy people whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy most precious blood*:

then the Hymn: then the Sermon—I know not what: she left the Church, and threw the poison into the Thames. Now that disconsolate life, that desperate soul, has found entire rest and peace in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. God followed up His gracious work by other instrumentality, till He made the word behind a word also within.

Great solemnity is given to these Temple Church Sundays by one such history, one such experience. What ought to be the earnestness of the Minister, what ought to be the devoutness of the Congregation, when he knows, and they know, that, in the very midst of them, there may be a fierce battle like this raging in secret between Christ and the devil! How frightful does such a reflection render the profaneness which is (I had almost said) rampant here side by side with the agony! I myself see from the Altar-Table a levity and a trifling which would be incredible without

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the eye-witness. Scarce a Sunday or two after the secret wrestling of that soul which was here saved as by fire, two other persons—as young, as seemly, as decorous (doubtless) in other things, as she of whom I have spoken—were discussing half-aloud, during the Service or Sermon, to the grave discomfort of others, their little plans of departure and journeying. Would to God that the word might this day be heard behind these, if they be again by chance here present, *Repent, and believe, and be saved!*

4. But neither Providence, nor conscience, nor even the Gospel, is the very voice itself, which is here predicted and promised.

There was one special gift and grace of this final, this closing Dispensation, so wonderful, so stupendous, in its character, that even saints under the Old Testament—even the Baptist, who had a Dispensation all his own, between the Old and the New—were not in the King-

dom of Heaven for lack of it. That promise, that gift, that grace—the fulfilment of the promise here open before us—is the Holy Ghost the Comforter.

We stay not to enquire to-day in what respect the Pentecostal gift differed from the Pre-Messianic—or *He dwelleth with you*, from *He shall be in you*. Enough for us to record, to emphasize, and to lay to heart the Scripture. The word, the voice, saying, not once for all, but in each instance and each instant of duty, *This is the way*—when we, but for it, are turning aside to the right hand or to the left—is that of God's Holy Spirit; purchased for us on Calvary; outpoured upon us—yea, upon the Church and the Christian of all time—at Pentecost; sought day by day, received day by day, in each emergency of being, but not less in the unmarked colourless days of existence, by every believing man, as the anointing oil of the day's consecration, as the informing,

enabling, empowering influence of every duty and of every devotion ; as the vital supply which makes the whole body of Christ one ; as that present possession which guarantees in the future the resurrection of the just, and the everlasting life of heaven.

Whither, my brethren, has this hope of the Church fled, that we seldom hear of it now, save in some vague, generalized, impersonal figure, such as influence, assistance, or grace? Sure I am, that if we would ever know what the true life of God is, we must stir up within us the revelation of the Holy Ghost. Sure I am, that, if we would ever find comfort in prayer, access to the Throne, or strength for holy living, we must find each, find all, in a far more intelligent, reliant, affiant, entreaty for the personal presence and indwelling of the Holy Ghost. What are we not missing by our indifference, by our unbelief? Saints of old *prayed in the Holy Ghost, were in the*

Spirit on the Lord's Day, had the love of the *Spirit* for their chief plea one with another, had the *supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ* for the very life-blood circulating in the soul's veins, giving vigour to their health and vitality to their life.

Brethren, when the Son of Man cometh, shall He, even in this one primary, vital point, find faith in His very Church? What might not preaching be, if the sinful man who rises with his *word of exhortation for the people*, had first clothed, endued, hidden, lost himself in the Holy Spirit? *O hide this self from me*, we pray, half in vain—why? Because we do not realize as we ought that only possible way of putting off the old man, which is the putting on the new. Only he can be indeed self-forgetting, who is pervaded, transfigured, re-created, by receiving into him the Spirit which maketh all things new. Only he can do one day's or one hour's work, not

for self, but for God and Christ and eternity, who prays, not in word but in deed, for the entrance into him of the Holy Ghost to enable him both to will and to work of God's good pleasure.

Then, in each difficult duty—then, in each critical struggle—then, in each depressing circumstance, inward and outward, whether of loss, or of weakness, or of solitude, or of self-reproach, or of utter, wretched, desperate self-aborrence—we shall still, listening for it, hear the word behind: *Thou hast done all this wickedness*—yet this is the way: God, who has been pleased to buy you back with the blood of Jesus, will not leave nor forsake you: He will guide you still with His counsel; He will receive you at last to His glory.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT,

December 24, 1871.

V.

SET THINE HOUSE IN ORDER.

Set thine house in order.—ISAIAH xxxviii. 1.



HE person here addressed was a King. The house here was a palace. To *set the house in order*, was to *give charge concerning a kingdom*, threatened with the premature loss of a wise and God-fearing monarch.

Such a command, and the prospect opened by it, for a country as well as for a soul, must at all times be solemn and awful. We can ourselves appreciate it to-day.

We seemed, three short weeks ago, to hear that edict issued with regard to a life dear to England; *Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house.*

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in order : for thou shalt die, and not live. A whole nation, in Scripture language, *turned its face to the wall and prayed* to God, not in vain, for that life.

The case before us to-day, on the open Bible page, is very peculiar. Here was an exceptionally good and religious king—a wise and powerful reformer in Church and State—threatened with speedy death, in the very crisis of the national fortunes. An expression used in the 6th verse seems to imply that the overthrow of the Assyrian invader, described in the preceding chapter (as we have heard it this morning), had not yet been accomplished. The marginal dates place this illness three years before that signal deliverance. The succession not yet provided for, the heir-apparent not yet born, the king himself still under forty years of age—we can imagine the consternation with which the tidings came abroad in Judah and Jerusalem, that Hezekiah, *the captain of his*

people, had received the fatal summons to *set his house in order* as he might, and prepare to meet his God.

Not his subjects only, but himself, prayed for a respite.

It is one of the most touching evidences of the uniqueness of the Gospel Revelation in its lighting up of the world beyond death, to find a servant of God, under the Old Dispensation, pleading for his life at God's footstool, not only on the ground of work still on hand which his death would ruin, not only on the ground of graces still to be cultivated or faults still to be conquered before he can dare to pass into that everlasting state, but on this account rather—that life, this life of flesh and blood, is the one only time of hope and praise, of God's sight and God's service. *The grave cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee ; they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth : the living, the living—such is the*

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mournful refrain—*he shall praise*, he shall see.

The prayer is heard. *Afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, the word came to him, bidding him turn again and announce these two things in answer to the cry and to the tears—*

(1) On the third day he shall be sufficiently restored to go up to the house of the Lord.

(2) There shall be added to his days fifteen years of life.

Many reflections suggest themselves.

1. Prayer, like truth, is mighty, and shall prevail. Never say that it is presumptuous to pray for temporal blessings; for life, your own or another's; for recovery from sickness, when physicians despair. We know not how—we cannot see the point of junction between the natural and the supernatural: we know only this, that Prayer is the will of God, and that one will of God can never affront or contradict another.

2. We see in this instance the suppressed clause in all God's threatenings. The Prophet Ezekiel is instructed to tell us that it is always there. When God threatens, ever so definitely—if repentance comes, if godly sorrow, if deep humility, if the soul's prayer of faith, God counts it no breach of His word to unsay the threatening. There is an 'if' behind in all God's judgments. If thou repent of the sin, God will repent of the judgment. The thought is a profound one, and will bear the pondering. To break a promise is to be false: to revoke a threatening when its moral purpose is answered, is to be merciful and yet true.

3. There was one man—we recall not at this moment a second—who knew precisely how long he had to live. Different saints of God have had different characteristics of grace; and so also of Divine dealing. Hezekiah's was this—he knew fifteen years beforehand the day of his death. Where others would

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speaking of days, he can speak of years: *I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul.* It must have been a strange experience, as the seasons passed over him, to know exactly where he stood in the (usually uncertain) flight of time. To have to reply, when friends wished him 'many happy new years,' 'Say ten,' or, 'Say five,' at last, 'Say one;' to be compelled to lay every plan, to arrange every duty, to view every face, to encounter every temptation, with the foreknowledge of just so many years and months and weeks and days, not one more, to do it in; and to move everywhere, not, like his fellows, amidst conjectures and peradventures, but amidst certainties projected upon his way, and with a future as distinct to him and as definite as the present—well might he, as he has it here in his *writing*, *go softly* all these fifteen years; live in that spirit of humility, and tenderness, and reverence, and godly fear, which

befits a life marvellously restored, and a life consciously, prophetically bounded! It was a precarious and it was a doubtful blessing. Which of us, my brethren, could be trusted with it? Which of us, wise for this world or for that, would so much as desire it? Procrastination while the fifteen years were in their fulness before us—procrastination, perhaps security, perhaps carelessness, perhaps an almost license in sinning—then, by degrees, as they wane, as they attenuate themselves into the five or the one, excitement, agitation, hurry, haste, not speed, in the awful preparation—Oh, it is of mercy, believe us, that we know not, we, the day nor the hour—bidden to watch and pray always, because we know not in what watch of that night which is the life, the house of this tabernacle shall be finally broken through!

Set thine house in order.

The last day of the year guides me to my

subject. It is a very comprehensive subject. Hezekiah had this charge enforced upon him by a sickness—but it needs not sickness to make it just: if it is unheard in health, the probability is that in sickness it will be no trumpet-call of grace, but rather the death-knell of judgment. Therefore we will listen to it to-day—while the evil days come not—while *the entrance of the holiest* is still open—while to hear is to live.

What is this *house* which is to be *set in order*?

Scripture, that far-reaching, wide-sweeping, deep-searching Book of God, makes the word *house* very real, very significant.

1. It calls a country a house.

The house of Jacob—the house of Israel, of Joseph, of Judah, of David. Therefore there is a house too of England; and the setting of that house in order, the *giving charge concerning* that house, has both occupied the latest

thoughts of her greatest, godliest kings, and is in fact the perpetual occupation of every legislator and every statesman worthy of the name. O for one breath of God's Spirit to waft across the hot atmosphere of vain, selfish, self-seeking Party the clear health-giving breeze of Christian patriotism, of Divine philanthropy! Inhale that breath, ye who would be politicians! Inhale it from the Book of books, which tells what is vile and what precious; what is of the earth, earthy and perishable, and what is from above, pure and noble, and peaceable and everlasting! Cast away the sordid, scrambling, squalid maxims which would make patriotism itself an hypocrisy and an imposture, and let yours be the splendid, the saintly devotion of which fools may make a mock, but by the strength of which, manifested in each age and generation of our English history, this country has risen, step by step, to her place and to her rank among the nations!

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Every institution of our national life is a house to be set in order. It is a common saying, The institutions of the country are on their trial. It is so. The days are past when old things stood because they were old. Eyes are turned upon them now, curious, scrutinizing, not always friendly eyes, and according as they are, so will they be handled. There is a judgment by works, even in the present. Every house that would stand must set itself in order.

We are instructed in this Church, Sunday by Sunday, to pray for *the two learned and honourable Societies of this House*; recognizing, in Scripture phrase, a corporate existence, a corporate life, in these *institutions set apart for the study and practice of the Law*; recognizing, moreover, a Divine aspect, a Divine responsibility, in the light of which prayer is no profaneness, but a duty, a hope, and a religion.

The subject of Prayer is prescribed—*that all who shall be called to any office among us may serve truly and faithfully, to the glory of God, and to the present and future welfare of His people ; always remembering the strict and solemn account which they themselves must one day give before the judgment-seat of Christ.*

My brethren, I would ask of you one question, Have these words any meaning? Is it indeed so, that not only they who stand before you to minister, and whose responsibility neither you, nor (I trust) they, are likely to forget—but you too, the honoured office-bearers and managers of this House, have a duty and a responsibility towards it for which you must give account? I pray you to lay it to heart, if it be so—or else to suffer me to strike out these idle, these profane words from a form of Prayer which must be either a reality or a mockery.

Set thine house in order. See whether this

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institution is doing its duty before God and man. See whether its large resources are applied with scrupulous fidelity to the promotion of your great science, and to the education and discipline of your students in it. See whether your servants, your dependents, are ruled and ordered in all things for their souls' good, in the fear of God. See whether in all this you are behaving yourselves not as owners but as stewards—stewards of one of God's manifold gifts; remembering always the great audit-day; remembering who has said, *Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.*

2. There is a House too of which it is written that it is *the Church of the living God*. We have no power, any of us, to set that House in order. It is in the hands of Him who said, *Lo, I am with you always*; and again, *The gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. But within that great Communion

of Saints which is altogether of Christ and in Christ, there are two fellowships or communities through which we exercise our citizenship in the highest, the universal. One of these two is the Church of England. Still so called. Still, more than any other Christian body, vindicating its right to the name. Every member of this body has, or ought to have, an ear for the call, *Set this house in order.* We can all help, though it be in a humble and subordinate way, to make this Church of England more pure, more consistent, more charitable, more spiritual—in the same degree, more Church-like because more Christ-like. We can all set forward, in our own little circle, that principle of judgment, which is always sound, always righteous, *Receive ye one another, as Christ also hath received us, to the glory of God. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own*

master he standeth or falleth. We can apply these rules to communities as well as to individuals, and rejoice to widen, not to narrow, the sphere of our sympathies and the franchise of our city. In the same degree will the Church of England be strong, in which she is charitable, respectful, and loving towards those who differ. We should rejoice too in every improvement, great or small, introduced into her system. Instead of standing on the defensive, and challenging at every turn the authority by which a change for the better is brought in, we ought to be glad when, under Christ's overruling Providence, at all events—can we dispute that?—any modification of the Church's system is effected, by which she may become more elastic, more versatile, more attractive, more persuasive, to those who, for good or evil, are hers if any one's, and will either listen to her voice, or to no voice, in the things of the soul and eternity.

On this account we would hail that change—too much made of, perhaps, by friends and foes, yet not insignificant or unimportant—which the New Year, beginning from next Sunday, will inaugurate, in this Church as in most Churches, in our Table of Lessons ; a change, if not all that we could wish—if, in any respect, insufficient, or, as I believe it to be in some points, no change for the better—yet at least a change, made with the best intention, by the Church's most devoted sons, and having these four features of good, to which others, doubtless, might be added : (1) That it prevents the weariness of excessive length—which is, in other words, the driving out of good impressions by their unseasonable multiplication : (2) that it gives alike to morning and evening congregations their share, their equal share, of Gospels and Epistles : (3) that it brings back into prominence some utterly neglected Books of Holy Scripture : (4) that it

provides for the wants of town congregations the great advantage of alternative Lessons; in other words, of Lessons available for a third Service—of the want of which those can best judge who have ministered in large Parishes, where the evening Service has overshadowed, without exterminating, the Service of the afternoon.

These are signs of life, for which Churchmen may thank God and take courage.

Besides the Church, there is the Congregation.

Brethren! we linger in these dear, these holy precincts—in this Temple Church, so rich in its memories and in its associations—and we say to you concerning them, concerning it, *Set thine house in order.*

Of the hundreds, of the tens of hundreds, here worshipping on the Sundays of one year, how many are Communicants—obeying the precept, *Do this in remembrance of me?* How

many are almsgivers—obeying the precept, *To do good and to distribute forget not?* How many are spiritual worshippers—obeying the precept, *God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth?*

3. Finally, my brethren, there is a House also of the life. Of the life—inward, and outward. *Set thine house in order.* The charge is comprehensive—it is particular too.

Not beyond Christ's notice is the relative life.

Owe no man anything. Let no tradesman, no servant, no son, be defrauded of his due. *Say not, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give, when thou hast (or oughtest to have) it by thee.* Let no inferior have the excuse, through thy remissness in paying, for keeping another, lower yet in the social scale, waiting for his due from him. Let no honest customer be made to pay an exorbitant price for the necessities of his life, because thou art fashionable and

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keepest back thy payments. Oh, there is a charity, there is a justice, there is a religion, there is a Christianity, in these things, through despite of which sin is encouraged and Christ recrucified in His own.

And, as for life, so for death, *set thine house in order*. Make thy will, and make it equitably. Let that paper, which none will see till thou art in thy coffin, do justly and do mercifully to thine own. Let thy petty or thy graver quarrels die with thee—and let thine own rise up, when thou art gone, and call thee righteous.

We pass within the home—and we ask concerning it, Is it set in order?

We would question you, brethren, in Christ's name, on this last day of the year, as to the habits, as to the inmates, as to the practices and doings, of the home. Is God, is Christ, remembered there, and there honoured? Is the fire kept alive upon that

altar? Is prayer offered day by day, and is it a reverent, a thoughtful, and a pure offering? Are the souls of those thought of, whose bodily service is so unquestioningly relied on? Can you assume, regarding them, what you know that you cannot take for granted concerning yourself, that all is well within, that sin is fenced out, and that God is all in all?

Brethren! we are pursuing you into your secret shrine and sanctuary of being—and we pray you to enter into judgment with yourselves that ye be not judged by the Lord. Is there, is there—ask yourselves, is there—anything wrong, anything wicked, in your lives? Oh, if there be—and *who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?*—if there be, grapple with it, I pray you, on the instant. Say not, brave men, who would scorn to shun any other encounter, I dare not face the devil! Call God in, by His Almighty Spirit, and set the house of your life

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in order, ere the fatal edict go forth against you, in your squalour and in your confusion, *Thou shalt die, and not live!*

There is yet one place more sacred, more secret, even than the life. It is the soul—the wonderful, mysterious, immortal thing, which must return, at death, to God who gave it. How stands it with the soul? Is it set in order? Is it securely anchored upon the rock, Christ? Has it still any poor, variable, self-deceiving reliance upon its own righteousness? Is it still patching up a wretched, wind-swept, rain-mouldered tenement, of the self-innocence, of the self-strength? Then let it lay afresh its very foundations! Let it see that only God can make atonement for sin—only God can bring in an everlasting righteousness, prevalent to stand the shock of that tempest which shall mingle earth and sky. To Christ, to Christ, to Christ Himself and alone, bring your sins to be washed out, and your wicked-

nesses to be made white as snow. Resolve that, when you stand, as stand you must, alone, naked, and shivering, before the great white throne, this shall be your plea, this your answer, before listening worlds of Angels and of men—

Thou didst make Him who knew no sin, sin for me, that I might be made, in Him, Thy very righteousness, O my God.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS,
December 31, 1871.

VI.

LIGHT OUT OF DARKNESS.

God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness,
hath shined in our hearts.—2 CORINTHIANS iv. 6.



EPTUAGESIMA is Creation Sunday. A two-fold significance is given to it this year, when in the new Table of Lessons the last two chapters of the Bible are set side by side with the first, and the words, *In the beginning God created*, are thus contrasted with the other words, *Behold, I make all things new—I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.*

Creation and re-creation are opposed, not in general only, but in particulars.

In the one, there is a *gathering together of*

the waters, which God called Seas, and saw that it was good. In the other, the re-creation, there was no more sea: that mighty barrier between race and race, between man and his fellow, has disappeared with the obliteration of discord, warfare, and sin.

In the one, God set lights in the firmament of the heaven, to give light upon the earth—God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. In the other, they need no candle, neither light of the sun—for there shall be no night there.

In the one, there is the tree of life in the midst of the garden, but (as it should seem) never partaken of, and ere long fenced finally from man's touch: there is also the tree of knowledge of good and evil, instrument of man's woe, cause of his curse and of his exile. In the other, the tree of guilty knowledge has no place; while the tree of immortal life stands in the very street of the city and

on either bank of its river—*bearing twelve manner of fruits, and yielding her fruit every month—and the very leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.*

Thus the magnificence of God's Revelation is presented to us in one view—the Creation in Adam, and the Creation in Christ. The original handywork, to be stained by sin, sullied by misery, wasted by death—and the new heaven and earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, of which God Himself, in Christ, in the Holy Ghost, is the Light and the Joy and the Temple.

But what, the heart asks, is the link, and the bridge, and the contact, between these two Creations—between the Genesis and the Apocalypse—between the Cosmos that was and the Cosmos that shall be?

My brethren, God leaves not Himself without witness even here. He neither scathes us with the vision of a glory lost, nor dazzles us

with the vision of a glory prophesied, without adding a third vision, of which the text speaks; the vision of a present glory, repairing the past, preparing the future; open now, accessible now, to the eyesight of faith, to the foot-step of prayer.

There is a third creation, between the Genesis and the Apocalypse; as wonderful as either, when it is looked into; the work of the same Almighty Hand, the revelation of the same unsearchable Love. *God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness*—God, who in Creation said, *Let there be light*, and there was light—the same God, St Paul says, *hath shined in our hearts, to give there the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ*.

We have been keeping, three days ago, the anniversary of St Paul's Conversion. The world, yes, the Church's world, was busy, and ran its daily round regardless. Yet that day,

brethren, is more to us than any birthday or wedding-day, any accession or coronation, any Trafalgar or Waterloo. That day is more truly England's, Europe's Epiphany—the Manifestation of Christ to us Gentiles—than the festival which bears the title, and which commemorates, rather as a type surely than a fulfilment, the visit of the Eastern Magi to the Infant King in Bethlehem. *By the preaching of the blessed Apostle St Paul*, the Collect for the 25th of January reminds us, *God caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world.* It is no hyperbole. His was the foot first planted on European soil in the name and by the commission of Jesus Christ. His was the mind—and it is a more solid argument—first gifted with the grand conception of the æcumenical scope, the world-wide compass, of the Gospel of the Cross and the Resurrection. But for him, Christianity itself might have remained (humanly speaking) to this day a mere

sect or developement of Judaism; a religion fenced by rigid and repulsive conditions, making it, even if true, tolerable only to the ascetic and the ritualist; no faith, no hope for mankind; no liberty for the captive, and no Gospel for the labouring and the heavy-laden.

It is a matter of deep interest—were it but as the history of a mind, or the study of a character—to hear what St Paul has to say concerning his first reception of this Gospel.

We know that many things are said in foolishness, many things in hypocrisy, many things under excitement, more or less under illusion, as to the transactions of the soul with God who gave it.

It is not easy to say, in all cases, where fact ends and fancy begins. Not easy, as Scripture says, to separate the chaff from the wheat, the precious from the vile. There is a vein of insanity, or half-sanity, psychologists say, in us all; and it is not wonderful that it should

sometimes intertwine itself with our religion. Then it becomes wildness, enthusiasm, fanaticism—it may even run on into madness, into suicide, into murder. This we all know. The irreligious world takes care that we shall well remember it. Therefore we have to examine before we believe.

I ask you to examine St Paul. You have the means of doing so. You have a biography of him. You have more than one autobiography. You have a large collection of his letters. You have the deposit, the product, the net result, of his life—

Si monumentum quæris, circumspice.

Therefore in this case it is no blind guessing. You have no need, here, to apply the sagacious caution, I must have proof. You have it. A man who could so act, and so write—so reason, and so feel—so labour, and so persevere—so struggle against opposition, against ridicule, against prejudice, against ill-treatment,

against ill health, and all its concomitants—so endure and so prevail—a man who could so live and so die—die and not die—though dead, thus speak, in his words and in his acts—such a man could have been no vulgar enthusiast. When I ask him what account he gives of himself, I am sure that I shall hear no lie and no folly—I have his life before me, and can judge—and he tells me that his Christianity began with a Conversion; a Conversion which there was everything to preclude—education, habit, conviction, zeal, purpose general and special—but which was so startling, so (to himself) imperious, so thorough, so transforming, that he lived all the rest of his life in the light of it; parted with everything on account of it, except his good sense, his logical power, his indomitable will; a Conversion, which in the text he calls an exercise of creative strength, of the same Omnipotence which spake light out of darkness—the same Omnipotence, he

elsewhere says, which raised Christ from the dead, and set Him at God's right hand in the heavenly places.

He compares it—and, considering the narrative of the event, very naturally—to a glorious light kindled in his heart; an illumination which flashed knowledge; and that knowledge the personal knowledge of God—revealed to him in the face, in the countenance, in the moral and spiritual character, of Jesus Christ.

There was a description, in the Old Testament Scriptures, of a light which shone in the face of Moses when he came forth from God's presence to communicate with his people. That light, St Paul says, shines now in the face of Christ; and it is reflected in the hearts of those who believe. We see God Himself, in the mirror of Christ crucified and glorified: at last, by perpetual gazing, we too shine; are transformed, he says above, into the same image, by the operation of Him who is, at once, Lord and Spirit.

There is a growing sense in the Church, my brethren, of the inadequacy of our average Christian life.

An age, marked, like ours, by a strong practical character, by an impatience of names and forms, by an intolerance of conventionalities and impostures, going all lengths in plainness of speech and directness of action, might be expected to deal severely with unrealities of religion.

The world outside is never weary of hinting that all worship is feeling, and all faith tradition. If it amuses you, if it soothes you, if it wiles away a weary hour, or if it stimulates your amiable sentiments into kindly and beneficent action, let us not, they condescend to say, interrupt or disquiet you. We know better: but life is a nursery, and little children must have their play. High above the highest attainments of the loftiest spirituality ranks alike the intellect of the philo-

sopher, the ability of the statesman, and the industry of the naturalist. But, if you like the other, have your way.

This is the value of religion, as the outer world estimates it. The Church, meanwhile, is grieved and wearied by experiences of failure. She feels that she has not reaped the fields white to the harvest. She sees the multitude escaping her—were it but for a homelier teacher, a humbler synagogue, and a less tasteful ritual; more often, alas! for influences utterly irreligious and secular, under which the Gospel is simply cast aside as an old-world, a worn-out superstition.

Yet is even this not the whole, nor the worst, of her sorrow. Even they who have gone out from her, not being of her, are not the thought nearest at this moment to her heart. There is a closer anxiety still. And that is, the coldness, the deadness, the unbelief, and the irreligion, of those within. For

these—for the formal, the unawakened, the lifeless worshippers—can nothing be done? Must they, must they, sleep on and die? Must they to the end have a name to live and be dead—benumbing the Church with their palsy, and giving every possible occasion to the enemy to blaspheme?

The question is asked, in our hearing, by all manner of men; by men who call themselves distinctively Churchmen, and by men who hold the tradition which was once a living and life-giving Evangelism: all alike feel the want, smart under the self-reproach, and are asking of themselves and of one another, What shall we do to stir this torpor, to breathe life into this death? And what is also remarkable, the first answer given by different parties is, in form and seeming, the same all over the country: alike in this swarming capital, and in remotest country towns, we hear of that which men in these days call a Mission—with its open

Churches, perpetual Services and Sermons, Chapels and School-rooms crowded with impressed listeners, for eight days continuously—all aiming at the same point, the quickening of dead souls; the endeavour to carry the outward light within, and (as it is sometimes strikingly expressed) to turn the historic Christ into One real, living, and personal.

Now some features of good are here at once observable.

Here is earnestness, zeal, life, in the few: and it is showing itself towards the many. Here is none of that selfishness in religion, which, in other days, made men build Churches, buy masses, appropriate pews, for themselves, careless of the poor excluded perhaps by their spiritual luxury; or which, at the best, made pious people isolate themselves from the world, read Sermons or books of devotion in their arm-chair or by their fireside, and almost thank God that they were not as

other men, almost congratulate themselves on the terrific saying, that *many are called, but few chosen.*

There is, again, in this stirring of souls, a point of comparison, of advantageous comparison, with a generation, a century, that is gone. Here is the spirit of Wesley and Whitefield—and lo, it is suffered, it is encouraged, well if it be not even flattered, by the Church of England and by its priests. It is well. It was shameful, for a thing calling itself a Church, that they who would be zealous, even if it were in odd rough ways, must needs go out of it. We may *thank God and take courage* that a Mission now, a Revival now, is within.

And once more, how near is the agreement, in this matter, to the casual eye at any rate, of what we generally distinguish as High Church practice and Low! In the same Mission there are sometimes High and Low;

occupying, it may be, different buildings, but with one organization; in the best of all senses, agreeing to differ; not in cold indifference, not in a languid, indolent, or (so called) inward union, but in a sympathy truer and more intelligent, springing out of a common love to Him who died to gather together in one all the children that without Him are scattered abroad.

When we pass within the veil, and seek to enter into the definite aims of this novel agency, we pause many times, we are conscious of many misgivings, we waver and halt, and question much with ourselves, not liking it all, scarcely liking any of it—acknowledging the good intent, but seriously diffident as to the machinery and the result.

Two opposite tendencies manifest themselves. I take them as specimens—for the time is short.

Some Missions definitely propose to them-

selves Confession as the object. They would stimulate the sense of sin. They would aggravate the burden of unforgiveness. They would quicken the impulse to make a clean breast of it. They would urge the comfort of having nothing hidden. They would make it insufferable to go about masked. They would terrify the conscience with the peril of worshipping, of communicating, with sins concealed and festering. They would urge the necessity of getting rid of the sin itself which a repeated half-repentance does but make exceeding sinful. Thus far every serious Christian will go with them. We only stop when we find that confession means confession to (or through) a man; that that medicine which the Church of England offers in two definite instances—where there is some special disquiet of the conscience keeping a man from Communion, and where there is some special sin troubling the sick man in the prospect

of death—is proposed to us as the very diet of the soul in life and health; to the great weakening (as we think) of the spiritual muscle and sinew; to the utter annihilation of the honest wholesome independence of the man in Christ; to the practical setting aside of that one Divine Mediation and Confessorship which our Lord Himself has undertaken for us, and in virtue of which no man needs to keep upon his mind for one day or one hour one single sin, however great or however small, which he has committed—the door into the Holy of holies being for ever open, and we being taught, besought, importuned, to enter, through it, perpetually, for pardon and healing, by the blood of Jesus.

The other dealing with souls is most diverse, most opposite. It consists in the instant, universal, imperative presentation to the enquirer, of the doctrine, the fact, of a present, an instantaneous salvation. Christ is all—

accept Him. Believe in His blood as shed for you. Know yourself forgiven, and you are so. It is unbelief to doubt of your pardon. It is there—it is sealed: it is here—it is given. Have you found peace—now—now? Have you found it yet? Pray on. There—have you found it now? You shall not leave this room, you shall not rise from your knees, till you have it—securely—once for all—for ever.

This is the stimulating, exciting, intoxicating draught which many men in these days offer as the whole Gospel. I speak of that which I know—of that which has of late been brought very near to me. I have found how strong, how potent, may be this enchantment. I tremble lest in some cases it prove itself a delusion, as unquestionably in many cases it will be but a short-lived joy. And yet how narrowly does it miss being true! How difficult is it to interpose a caution, without seeming to throw doubt upon the very centre and

kernel of the Gospel, *I believe in the forgiveness of sins!* And yet something there is in it not of the everlasting Gospel. I do not find that Christ repelled upon earth one person who came to Him, saying, *If Thou wilt, Thou canst*, for not saying also, *I know, I see, I feel Thou wilt*. I do not find St Paul pressing upon his converts this *peace at any price*, or telling the man who does not confidently write himself elect, that, till he can do so, he is limiting God or making the personal Christ historic.

I know indeed that, of all God's gifts to His redeemed, none is more signal, more heroic, more sustaining, than the gift of a calm, a stedfast, an unassailable trust in the reality of a personal, an individual acceptance. He gave this to St John—He gave this to Luther—He gave this to Wesley—He gave this to Simeon—He gives this, at His pleasure, to one and to another of His chosen—qualifying them for

mighty deeds, for the confessions and heroisms and martyrdoms, for the mighty soul-moving ministries of the Church, one and manifold, which is His body. But to say that He gives it to all ; that it is His first gift to each ; that it is the one, one mark of true conversion ; that to be without it, or to possess it but faintly and in peradventure—this belief, I mean, that I personally am washed and justified and sanctified, am chosen and sealed and saved—is to be no Christian ; this surely is to do violence alike to Scripture and to experience ; it is to run a fearful risk of multiplying delusions, hypocrisies, backslidings, apostasies ; it is to make men put peace before holiness ; it is to turn the eye of the heart from the mighty Christ of the Gospel to the paltry sinner himself who would comprehend Him ; it is to make the heart of the righteous sad, whom God hath not made sad, if it be not also to strengthen the hands of the wicked by promising him life.

O for that Divine Spirit, alike of wisdom and love and holiness, who spake by the Apostles, and who gently guides those who submit themselves not into half but into all the truth! How has the Church suffered from the loss, first here, then there, of the analogy, of the proportion, of the faith! One fragment, one morsel, one crumb of the holy feast, placed under the microscope of pious exaggeration, and so magnified into the whole of it! It is hard too, it is hard, I say, upon the man of calmer thought and wider view, to be compelled, by these distortions, to seem as though he disparaged the blessed verity which he only seeks to balance. It is true, it is true, holy brethren, we do need to apprehend more vividly, to apply more boldly, to cherish more fondly, this particular revelation of the personal forgiveness. A holy man of the last generation said, in the young crisis of his soul's battle for eternity, 'If that be true'—that Christ bore

on the Cross all the sins of all men—‘if that be true, my sins shall not be on my own head another hour—and they were not;’ and in the might of that faith, which never failed him again through the five and fifty years of a ministry rich in blessing, he went forth to his life’s work, *made out of weakness strong*. His faith wrought with his works. Prayer and self-denial and toil and patience marked one by one the onward days, and attested the conversion and the justification. Yet he entered deeply and searchingly into the *things new and old* of God’s kingdom: he never narrowed the Gospel to one formula, nor taught men to turn the blessing of peace into a preliminary of discipleship.

Be it so with us! Let us pray earnestly for a marked conversion—probably we need it. Let us pray earnestly for a heart-deep repentance day by day—certainly we need it. Let us pray earnestly that the God who

spake light out of darkness may shine ever more and more in our hearts, in the face of Jesus Christ, unto conviction, unto consecration, in His own good time unto perfect peace. Let us pray earnestly that He will keep us from the false peace, and grant us only the true. *Righteousness and peace*, the Psalmist says, *have kissed each other*. It will ever be so, where both are true—where the righteousness is God's righteousness, and the peace is the peace of God. Let us never prescribe to Him the method, or the order, or the quantity, of His giving: only gather, with a glad heart, as He gives; knowing that to every praying, longing, waiting soul *is given grace according to the measure*—can we not trust Him?—*of the gift of Christ!*

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY,
January 28, 1872.

VII.

DIVESTITURE AND INVESTITURE— MINISTERIAL SUCCESSION.

and Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son : and Aaron died there in the top of the mount : and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount.—NUMBERS XX. 28.

IN these calm, almost cold, words is told all that man is to know of an event full of interest, full of mystery, full of awe.

In that year 1452 (as chronologers say) before the Christian era, a life is brought to its close, which, but for one other life beside it, would have been unique in wonder.

That old man who has gone up into Mount Moriah, under Divine direction, to die, is God's High Priest ; the first of a long line, the only

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line that God ever consecrated, to stand between Himself and His chosen people, in the things of religion and of the soul, until He should at last come, who is the End of all Revelation and the Antitype of all Priesthood.

His life has been long and eventful. For eighty years, and we know not how many more—for he was the elder of the two illustrious brothers—he had been one of Egypt's bondmen. The tradition of hope, which had cheered the death-bed of Joseph, had become dim and misty, as the weary years rolled over an oppressed and suffering people. At last a call, strong but secret, bids him go forth towards the desert to meet a messenger and a message from God. The bearer of it is a stranger. For forty years an exile; for other forty before them the inmate of a king's court, unknown to and ignorant of his own. Yet he is his brother: and upon those two men is laid a burden such as has no real parallel in

history ; first the deliverance of a nation from the midst of another nation by terrible signs and judgments, and then the education of the ransomed race into the stewardship of God's oracles of law and promise for the Church and the world of all lands and times.

Brethren ! the Bible is all truth, and its very heroes are seen compassed with infirmity. This old man, so illustrious in work and office, has no exemption from the failings and faults and sins of the fallen. The personal records of him are in large part records of this character. There is a mark of inspiration here. I pray you to give heed to it. Aaron is shut out from Canaan for a fault, for a sin. He is to die in this mountain because, in impatience, in irritation, in unbelief, he had been concerned in smiting a rock to which he ought but to have spoken. It was a disobedience. That there was faith even in the disobedience is no excuse for it in the sight of God.

Judged as man judges, it was a little sin. It was not the greatest of the sins even of this one life. But with God 'great' and 'little' have no place in the estimate of transgression. Here, in the sight of Israel, a precise direction had been disregarded: the wonder-working rod had been appealed to, as though the calm commanding word were insufficient: and the sentence, solemn and stern, is pronounced upon both the brothers, the law-giver and the priest of Israel, *Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.*

The lesson of 'severity' lies on the surface of the record. Surely we make much too free with the letter of God's commandment. We think nothing of smiting where God has said, *Speak*. If there be a general good intention—alas, even if there be not—we say to ourselves, perverting the Scripture, God will

not be *extreme to mark*. Breaking the letter, we may yet make up for it from the spirit. Surely *these things were our example*, and are written here, read this day for the first time as a chosen Lesson in our Churches, *for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come*.

Yet I think that there are two other lessons here taught us, not equally obvious, yet not less true.

One of these is the lesson of love. See how God chastens without disowning. Did God resign, renounce, the charge of this life, because He must punish? Nay, the Father's voice speaks still concerning it, and the Father's hand still directs. I cannot understand that reading of the Old Testament which sees not in it the God of the Gospel. Easy had it been for God to give up that rebel child, that oft-chastised yet unchastened son. Yet He does not. It is God who corrects yet forsakes not. It is

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God who says, *Take Aaron, and bring him up into Mount Hor ; and he shall die there.* It is God who says, later on, concerning the other leader of Israel, *Moses my servant is dead : my servant* still, though he is dead, and though God, dealing in one point more sternly with *him*, had sent him up into Mount Nebo *alone* to die there.

The other lesson is the lesson of death. It is the fashion to say that the language of the Old Testament is cheerless about death. I cannot see it. These deaths—if we might for a moment use the speech of men—these deaths for small sins seem to be eloquent as to the insignificance of death. They seem to say, The life that is seen is but a fragment of the whole life. It may be thou hast forfeited thy place here. God must call thee up into some mountain, or fling thee into some valley of humiliation, that thou mayest die there. Yes, but thou art His still—and when He has hum-

bled thee and crushed thee here, it is but that He may make thee shine before Him as the stars for ever.

So then, under God's direction—forget not that—the aged High-Priest must go up into that mountain-top—go, as a condemned man; go, to pay the debt not of original but of personal sin; go, and die there. His brother shall go with him: he has another year of life: he has been the direct voice of God to the other all these years—he shall be so unto the end. And his son shall go with him: he is to be his successor: he is to take from this scene the impress of life's charge and of life's end: already he has seen two brothers slain as in a moment for offering strange fire—now he must see a father die, die for a sin, and yet die cared for, die forgiven, loved, immortal. These are God's lessons for him—surely they are engraven upon his heart for ever! And all Israel is looking on: sees the High-Priest, in his gar-

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ments of full state, those garments *for glory and beauty* for which every minutest direction had been issued from Sinai, as proving the typical use and meaning; sees him rise step by step up the mountain side, and knows wherefore he is gone. How must some hearts have smitten themselves in that great concourse; hearts which knew themselves the cause of this chastisement, of this bitter yet most patiently borne privation! God keep us all from the sight of that deathbed which our hands, our sins, have made—or to which we have added that sting, which is sin!

Nothing is more pathetic in Holy Scripture than that selflessness which God requires in His servants; that absorption of natural feeling in the one higher, which is the perfection of the self-control and the self-forgetfulness. Aaron himself had been enabled to rise to it, when he saw his two sons cut off before him, forbidden to mourn, forbidden to bury them. I know

nothing more keenly wounding to hearts that can feel, than that apology of Aaron, in the day of his bereavement, for some omission of which he and his surviving sons had been guilty in the precise rules of the sanctuary. He had *held his peace* in the morning ; he had let more distant relatives perform the father's office of burying : the deep anguish only betrays itself in that one brief clause in which he appeals to his brother's pity about the neglected sin-offering, *And such things have befallen me !*

And now it is the turn of that brother to take his part in bearing the burden which God's ministry lays upon them that are privileged to exercise it. Now he must strip his dying brother of the beautiful and costly vestments of his priesthood. He must array in them a new Priest, who is to carry on God's work before a younger generation. And when the sad and solemn office is ended, he must turn back, with that other, to the thoughts and acts of the

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living, till he also shall have finished his course, and be ready to rejoin his brother in the Paradise of the just made perfect.

Yes, *made perfect*. Made perfect, through much discipline and much correction; by many a fall and many a rising; it may be, by an embittered life; it may be, by a premature death: perfect, not in the spotlessness of a sinless innocence, but in the *robes made white*, and the heart *eschewing its own wickedness*.

Such, brethren, is life—as the Word of God interprets it.

The garments of ministry, secular, sacred, personal, are stripped from one and put upon another. We wear them but for a lifetime. They were another's before us: they shall be another's afterward. There is a succession in these things: we do well to recognize and to give heed to it.

There are some forms of ministration which suggest succession. Those garments which are

emblematical of office—the judge’s ermine, worn only on the judgment-seat; the bishop’s lawn, put on with prayer and benediction, in the midst of the ceremony of his consecration—speak for themselves as to the disrobing. The wearer had a predecessor, shall have a successor, in that ministry. He is but the life-holder: less than the life-holder; for decay of strength, decline of vigour, may further abridge the tenure of that charge, towards God and man, which the vestment of office typifies. There must be that stripping of which the text speaks; that putting off that another may put on. Let him live in the foreview of that day. God makes not our differences between the sacredness of two ministries. Moses the judge ranks in Scripture above, not below, Aaron the priest. Would to God that there were that heart in us, to feel the sanctity of all office, the Divine source and right of all power! never to say, This office is secular, and a worldly

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spirit will suffice for it—and that office is sacred, and to the holder of it I will transfer every demand of disinterestedness and high principle and a good conscience! Would that we might follow the example, lately before us, of a distinguished Judge, living to a late old age with *eye undimmed and natural force unabated*, of whom it is told that the Bible was the companion of his circuits, and Sunday his day of days, holy indeed to the Lord and honourable—because he felt himself to be the steward of a high trust, and determined to render his account of it with joy and not with grief!

Brethren, we are all God's ministers, and to feel it is to consecrate life. No Profession, assuredly, exercises a more God-like office than that which undertakes to execute justice between man and man, and even to *bear the sword, not in vain*, against the soul that doeth evil. That Profession binds itself to be religious. It declares itself to be on God's

side in this warring, battling world : woe to it if it makes its familiarity with evil an excuse for forgetting the soul and the judgment !

We hold but for a few short years these ministries, these priesthoods, of duty and service. Soon we pass, and others succeed us. Soon will another voice be in the ears of another generation, and he who now speaks to you from this place the words of life will be silent, will be forgotten, for ever. None the less is the responsibility great for him and for you. These garments of office, sacred or secular, descend, not mechanically, but with an inheritance of influence, to the successor. Each one of us, charged with any trust, may make it, must make it, easier, or more difficult, for the next holder, to serve God in it, or to forget Him. We all know how the expectation, the demand, the requirement, of goodness, tends to foster and to create it ; how impossible at last it becomes for any but a good man to under-

take a particular office, which once perhaps involved no such necessity—but it pleased God to breathe into one man a new spirit, and the very place which he filled on earth became sanctified beyond desecration. So might it be with every office in the State and in the Church. It is the greatest crime that can be committed, to debase, to demoralize one. It is the highest Christian ambition to carry religion, which is the love of God, into one new department of earth's living activity.

Might it be so, that, in this one Church, of peculiar, of exceptional, of unique responsibility, there might be, Sunday by Sunday, the stirring of one new life, one new devotion! With what strength might God's work be done in England, if but a few of us His worshippers were impregnated with the sense of our responsibility! if we indeed felt ourselves to be His ministers, whatever the name or the nature of our calling! if we deeply pondered with

ourselves day by day the hour of the un-clothing and clothing upon—the work for which we must give account, and the eternity which shall be according to the things done in the body!

Behold in one view the littleness and the greatness of man.

The littleness in space and time. One generation goeth, and another cometh. Earth is a speck, and time a moment. If we would write our celebrity on earth, we write it in sand, we write it in water. Old age, failure, contempt, obliterate as we indite.

But, view life as a trust—view office, view work, view character, view being, as a Priesthood—and all is ennobled, all consecrated.

Say to yourself, I am God's priest—I wear His ephod and His crown, and the inscription on that crown is, *Holiness unto the Lord*—then you are great; great above kings, who know not a hereafter; great above hierarchies

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which would shine in God's stead : your light is God's light, and the world shall be the brighter for it.

But perhaps, brethren, you say to me, Mine is no priesthood. Mine is a very common lot on a very common earth. I see no sacrifice that I can offer. I am dust and ashes. You stir in me a sort of hope, but it has no reality and no substance. Tell me what you mean. I am a very common man, and I understand not what is that higher thing to which you call me.

God grant that this be the question, this morning, of many hearts! For, indeed, it is the question which is rare, not the answer which is difficult.

Yes, you are a priest. Take to you the holy garments—for you are God's priest. St Peter says so, the Apostle to the Hebrews says so, in words. It matters not how poor you are, or how ignorant, or how lowly : if you are a Christian, you are a priest. You may go

forth to-morrow to keep an office, or to sweep a street—and you have a priesthood, if you are a Christian. A priesthood that is yours but for a while: it must pass into other hands, and you must die. Still the world may be the better for you. The next occupant of your house or of your place may be a better man because you existed. You may raise expectations which he must satisfy. You may kindle an altar, which he, for decency's sake, must keep burning.

Succession is a beautiful thought. Moses stripped Aaron of his priestly garments: it was to put them upon Eleazar. Wash your robes, and make them white in the blood of the Lamb—and another must wear them. This is a succession, not of man, but of God. The very stones cry out, if your successor shall hold his peace.

Brethren, I would not deceive you with vain hopes. There is a condition. You are a priest

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if you are a Christian. Without this, you cannot be. Come to Christ; wrap yourself in His robe; wash yourself in the water, touch yourself with the blood, of His purifying, His propitiation—and you are a priest. But dispense with Him—try to offer your own sacrifice, try to wear your own robe of office—and you are none. The fire of your altar will sputter with a false flame: look round, and it is gone out.

Come to Christ, yourself, first of all. See yourself vile; see yourself helpless. Say to Him, Be my Righteousness, be my Strength. None that trusted in Him were ever confounded. None that lived inside Christ were ever left alone on their deathbed, or condemned in the judgment. Be His witness. Be His priest. Faults, backslidings, sins, sever not, necessarily, from Him. He is very pitiful, and of great mercy. Aaron sinned—Aaron made the idol calf—yet the Intercessor prayed for him, and he was forgiven. Aaron murmured against

Moses—Aaron smote the rock to which he should have spoken—Aaron was debarred from the land of promise—Aaron was stripped of the holy garments—yet Aaron was God's Priest and God's saint. God presided over the death—God has him in His holy keeping—God will raise him at the last day.

So be it, holy brethren, with you and with me! When we die, may God watch over us, and may the One Intransferable Priesthood—the Priesthood which knows no change, because it holds the very keys of Hell and Death—spread its robe and its tabernacle over us! In the day of days, may we hear that voice saying, Well done! and may we awake from the dust of death into the joys which are at His right hand for ever!

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER,
April 14, 1872.

VIII.

THE FACE SET TOWARD THE WILDERNESS.

He went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments,
but he set his face toward the wilderness.—NUMBERS
xxiv. 1.



VIDENTLY there is a change at this
point in Balaam's method.

Hitherto he has played the soothsayer. He has prefaced each utterance by a sacrifice and an augury. While Balak stands by the seven altars, Balaam withdraws himself into mystery, seeks a higher than the high place, thence gazes over the wide landscape, expecting some token which his art may interpret, and hoping to elude that oppressive Presence which had once and again overawed the curse into blessing. At last he feels, he confesses himself

vanquished, and, instead of renewing the practices of his magic science, awaits, with eye fixed upon the waste distant desert, a revelation different in kind from any that have gone before it.

It was a turning-point in his strange history. Not the first, nor the greatest, yet real, and, would he have had it so, saving.

His life had been—whose life is not?—full of these crises.

We paint him to ourselves as a man of great opportunity. His cradle was in the far East; in the region from which Abraham journeyed; in the region where lingered still some tradition of a true Theology; where men still called upon the name of the Lord, and made for themselves a strange compound of truth and falsehood, like that into which fragmentary knowledge always degenerates.

Balaam was a soothsayer by profession; but his incantations are in the name of Jehovah. Hence their superiority to contemporary rivals.

Hence (in part) the celebrity of the man whom an alarmed king summons from Aram, out of the mountains of the East.

It is probable that an access of light had visited Balaam in connection with the fame of the Exodus of Israel. In the open traffic and commerce between Egypt and the East, it could scarcely be but that rumours had reached him of the mighty signs and wonders of the outstretched Divine arm. All these he would easily arrange and systematize as new phenomena of his religion and new implements of his science. Doubtless they would marvellously strengthen his faith in that first principle, the Unity of God, the power of His operation, the nearness and accessibility of His presence, which made Balaam's soothsaying so potent, and contributed so largely to his influence and his wealth.

Thus when Balak's messengers reached him, with the offer of rich rewards, in money and

honour, if he will lend himself to the professional work of casting a malign spell, by his malediction, upon the fortunes of Israel—if, in plain terms, he will take a fee for that which conscience tells him is the wrong, the ungodly side in the mighty controversy between good and evil—he is thrown into that sort of perplexity which half-hearted men are perpetually incurring; the difficult, the insoluble problem, how (in the language of this morning's Lesson) to combine the service of God and of mammon, how to make two incompatible things consistent—the indulgence of inclination and the approval of God. He does that which thousands and tens of thousands are still doing daily—tries to get leave to sin; prays for direction with a mind made up; offers to give up anything which God shall forbid, yet comes again and again to induce God to unsay the saying and to speak wrong into right.

We all know that this can be done; that a

favourable answer can be got if we insist upon it ; that the edge of conscience is easily blunted, and, when blunted, pierces no longer to the dividing of soul and spirit, to the discrimination of good and evil.

Balaam had his choice, at that moment, not only between right and wrong, but between the true greatness and the false. If Balaam had been true to himself in that crisis of his being, he might have written his name on the everlasting page side by side with those few but illustrious men who, *having not the law, were a law unto themselves* ; having not the tables of stone, had the purport of the letter graven upon their hearts. But when Balaam first waited to see what God would say to him, and then, having got his answer, waited a second time and again enquired, he became, from that moment, not the friend but the slave ; no longer the confidential because true-hearted servant, but only the tool and the implement

of a purpose which tells him not its secret. He is to go with the men—as a criminal working in chains—as an animal yoked to the car of destiny—as a mere mechanical tongue uttering articulate yet unintentional sounds—as a man wishing for his wages, yet powerless to earn them—wishing to utter the curse, constrained to pronounce the blessing.

And thus, amidst the loudest professions of courage, amidst the strongest assertions of independence, he sets himself, nevertheless, to try again and again, by the help of every resource of his art, to change the unchangeable purpose, to bend the inflexible will. This is the secret of those seven altars, those twice seven victims, which he makes Balak provide as the preliminary of his incantations. He would buy the righteous Judge. He would purchase by gifts and offerings that consent which is the condition of his compliance. This is the secret of those withdrawals to meet God,

of those lonely speculations, from the top of the rocks, upon the free boundless sky, the wide measureless earth, that he may catch from sight or sound, from flight of birds or portent of clouds, that inspiration of malediction for which avarice is athirst.

In vain—in vain—all in vain! He sees at last that *it pleases the Lord to bless Israel*. He cannot curse whom the Lord hath not cursed; and the purpose will not change itself for all his watching. He must resign himself to the inevitable. The seven altars are smoking behind him; but he goes not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments. This time, it should seem, he keeps his place beside Balak: there is no record, now, of a going and a returning: he just sets his face toward the wilderness, in that fixed gaze which has God alone in its view; *sees Israel abiding in his tents*, in beautiful order, as under the skilful marshalling of an Almighty Leader, *according*

to his tribes; and the Spirit of God comes upon him. There is a difference, clear and perceptible, between this prophecy and the foregoing. Examine them, and you will find little but the repeated recognition of the Divine favour towards Israel. There is no comparison, as to the predictive explicitness, between them and this. While Balaam goes forth by professional rules to invoke God, the result is vague, dim, and tautologous. When he ceases to seek for enchantments; when he simply sets his face, desperate of skill and rule, to watch for God's word, and let the breath of God just play upon him as it will for instruction and guidance; then first in a higher and fuller sense the Spirit of God envelopes him, he hears the words of God, and sees the vision of the Almighty. Then first is unveiled to him the secret of the august future of Israel: in mysterious but magnificent type, the future also of the Church and of the world.

In outline dim and vast
Their shadows o'er him cast
The giant forms of Empires on their way
To ruin—one by one,
They tower, and they are gone—

Assyria herself, in the far foreview, carries away her captives: she in her turn pales before a power from the still sleeping West: and (if men read aright the last utterance of the departing seer) *he also*, the Western conqueror himself, is doomed to the ruin of his predecessors and his victims. It is the prophecy of Daniel, it is the prophecy of St John the Divine, written ages beforehand as in that invisible ink which discloses its secrets at the fire of history and of time.

We called this a crisis in the life of Balaam; because we see him at this moment conscious of a truth which might have been saving. He has learned the helplessness of man striving with his Maker. He has learned the futility of approaching the God of truth with a lie in the right hand. He has learned that to *set the face*

toward the wilderness is the one hope and wisdom of enquiring man : to look away from sorceries and enchantments, from omens and portents ; to look away from courts and crowds, from pleasures and businesses ; to look away from types and forms, from figures and ceremonies ; and to fix the earnest, unclouded, unfaltering gaze upon that solitude of earth and heaven which is the presence of the soul in the presence of God.

My brethren ! the crisis was lost, we know, upon Balaam. The dreams of avarice and of worldliness prevailed in him, even over the open vision. Foiled in his soothsaying, compelled to abandon the wage with the work, he betakes himself to meaner, viler, baser, alas ! also more potent, arts of ruin. Seduction conquers, where malediction is silenced. He falls at last, slain by injured Israel, in the camp of Midian : and he remains in God's Word as a monument of inveterate evil ; as that Balaam *which taught*

Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel in the form of idolatrous rites and licentious practices. We cannot alter his destiny—let us pray to learn something to-day from a single incident in his dread story. I find it here—

He went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness.

Brethren! there is in all of us a strange reluctance to the thing here described—this *setting of the face toward the wilderness* where God is alone.

1. I might say many things to you of the ministerial man; the man, I mean, whose office it is to communicate with God for the edification of His people. How often, when this ministry, the Church's prophesying, is to be exercised, does the indolent, the half-hearted, the perfunctory minister run to his *enchantments*; to his books and to his manuscripts,

to his notes and to his commentaries; to the old 'bakemeats,' his own or another's, which have done duty before, and can be made 'coldly to furnish forth' another 'table!' How often, to change the illustration, does the abler, the more ingenious, the more eloquent minister, betake himself to his task of preparation for preaching, by a mustering of his own gifts of argument, of rhetoric, of pathos and persuasiveness, as the enchantments by which he is to bring God (is not that his office?) into these hearts! How often does a man—to use the Prophet's strange but expressive metaphor—*sacrifice to his net, and burn incense to his drag*; pay the homage of a gratified vanity to his own performance, count instead of weighing his hearers, and set down all to his own credit in prophesying, of which he should rather say to himself in deepest self-humiliation, *What hast thou that thou didst not receive?* Steward of Another's treasures, how canst thou boast thyself?

And then we wonder if souls are not saved! saved by enchantments vainer far than omen or augury; vainer, hollower, more offensive, far, than Balak's rams or Balaam's auspices! O for one hour, for one moment, of that other method of prophesying, to which the text shall bear witness; that steadfast setting of the face of the soul toward God's wilderness; that earnest forthright gaze into the realities of man and God; that abstraction from earth's voices and man's self-vanities, that we may simply receive and reflect the glory of God, unveiled, in silent solemn solitude, to the humble waiting spirit, in the face of Jesus Christ! A Sermon thus pondered, thus written, thus preached, shall be indeed a prophecy of things future, a justifying of the ways of God to man.

2. Yet think not, brethren, that the Balaams of this age are all prophets, or that the warning of that awful man's story is only

for the professional teacher or the ministerial man. I seem to see a place for it in these lives—these lives which we live in common, the minister and the people.

How often, in the anxious questionings which life brings to all of us—at those ambiguous intersecting roads, of which one must, and but one can, be taken; at those dubious turnings, which compel decision, and cannot be decided upon twice over—is the temptation powerfully present to seek for some *enchantment* of discrimination between the wrong for us and the right! Who has not made advice such an enchantment? *In the multitude of counsellors there is safety:* but then the counsellors must be well chosen, must be honestly sought, must be diligently informed, must be faithfully followed. How many, seeking counsel on some point of duty, go not to their gravest, wisest, severest friend—to the man who will tell the unwelcome truth, and point

heavenward not earthward in his direction—but rather to the companion who will prophesy smooth things because he himself never hearkens to the rough! How many, desiring an opinion, seek it not but to confirm a foregone conclusion; seek it with the mental reservation, ‘If, that is, it agrees with my own!’ How many, professing to state their case candidly, keep back from the chosen counsellor that which is indeed its very point and hinge—just those antecedents, just those circumstances, which a man of God, viewing it, would feel to make it, for you, a sin or a duty! How many, more than all, put counsel itself out of its place; treat it, not as the handmaid of prayer, but as its substitute; find it easier, less irksome, less trying, to tell their tale to a hundred fallible mortal men, than to the One All-wise, Almighty, prayer-hearing God! How many, in the impatience of repeated disappointments, in the helplessness of perpetual failures,

in the just consciousness of their own weakness—just in all save the inference—have committed life and conscience and soul itself to the absolute dictatorship of a sacerdotal system and a human confessor! And how many, kneeling to pray, professing to tell all, and to submit all to the Divine Counsellor, yet in reality bring even to Him, not a case for direction, but a judgment for confirmation! Alas! if inclination has already spoken; if the self-will has already pronounced itself; if pleasure already impedes the view, and then we come to God to guide us towards the right; we come, like the men described in Ezekiel, with an idol in the heart and a stumbling-block before the face, and God, if He answers us at all, must (in His own most terrible phrase) answer us according to our idols. Thus He dealt with Balaam. Thus He deals every day, in judgment, yea, in mercy also, with the modern, the Christian Balaam. It would not be just, it would not be good, it would not

be merciful, that God should give the precious gift of His counsel to the man who would none of it. Far better, far more gracious in reality, that he should go his way as though it were the right way, and find it hedged with thorns, find an antagonist with drawn sword in its narrowest passage, or hear himself rebuked by his own dumb ass for forcing himself in mad perverseness along an impossible path. For in such a case prayer itself has been one of the enchantments, and the very first hope of eventual salvation lies in setting the face toward God's wilderness.

There can be no reality of prayer but in the desert. The desert itself may be a Church, or a thoroughfare; a crowded room, or a populous city. God can make even these a wilderness for His communion. The necessity is, that there be nothing between you and your God. The necessity is, that the eye of the soul should look straight and steadily towards Him whom

prayer addresses. This is the meaning of that parable of the eye single and evil, which describes the soul's intention as the one criterion of inner light or darkness. Desire to see God, and you shall see Him. Desire to have your way cleared before you, and he will do it though He show you but one step, or not even one step before you. Pray that even lame and blindfold He will lead, He will carry you—and it shall be done. Cast away the enchantments of self-will, of perverseness, of counsel superseding prayer, and of prayer dishonestly prayed; set your face resolutely toward God's presence, and doubt not that He shall be found.

3. I would have added a last word, did time permit, upon the application of the text not to the life but to the soul.

In these days not least, such a use of it is seasonable.

There is a movement, a stir, an unrest,

amongst us, in the things of the soul. It is a sign surely of good.

Side by side with a bold, and daily bolder, scepticism, which simply *passes by* the Gospel *on the other side* as an object too pitiable, too contemptible, to be worthy of rational notice, there is also—unbelief cannot ignore it—an anxiety, a curiosity, a readiness to hear, which secures an audience wheresoever there is a preacher; which fills our Churches in Lent and Passion Week; which stimulates all manner of agencies, regular and irregular, for bringing home the Gospel, and has unquestionably, within living memory, altered materially the circumstances and the prospects of religion and of the faith in England. In the same degree, my brethren, the warning is more urgent, that we confound not, in these highest matters, the *enchantments* and the *wilderness*. Who feels not in himself the easiness of listening, and the difficulty of pray-

ing? Who is not conscious of the temptation to compound for inward torpor by outward bustle, and to make a multiplication of Services and Communion an apology for neglect and shameful sloth in the nearer and more intimate converse between the soul and its God? We would be Christians, as it were, by calling Christ *Lord, Lord*, many times in each day not by entering the secret shrine of His presence; not by going after Him, with earnest resolution, into the Wilderness of the Temptation or the Garden of the Agony.

Brethren! the desert, to be found, must be made. It is not a place; it is a state. It may be in a crowd: it may not be in a cell. No enchantment of music or ritual, no enchantment of voice or Sermon, no enchantment of feeling or emotion, no enchantment of Mission or Passion-play, can advance us by one step, of itself, or for certain, towards the reality of which we are in quest. These things may

even be mischievous. In the wilderness is He whom we seek. There is no royal road to Him. In the heart of the heart must the way be prepared. The substitutes, the counterfeits, are many. Turn not the blessed ordinances, turn not the solemn Services, turn not the Evangelical Ministry, turn not the *lively oracles* themselves, into impediments—they may become so—to the living life-giving grace! When you see God, you will know it. Persuade not yourselves by a vain vision! When after much longing you at last behold; when after the mighty famine you at last eat and are satisfied; you will bless God for many things, but for this thing not least—that He suffered you not to fill yourselves with that which is not bread, nor to dream of food to awake with appetite. Set your face stedfastly towards the wilderness, and in due time—for they who would seek God must learn His patience—in due time you shall find if you

faint not ; you shall *taste and see that the Lord is gracious* ; you shall go from strength to strength ; at last the word of loving promise shall be verified in you—

If any man serve me, let him follow me : and where I am, there shall also my servant be.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER,
April 21, 1872.

IX.

DISAPPOINTMENT AND ITS CONSOLATION.

But I must die in this land ; I must not go over Jordan.—

DEUTERONOMY iv. 22.

But now I go my way to Him that sent me.—JOHN xvi. 5.

THE Law and the Gospel speak here.
The Foreteller, and the Foretold.
Moses, and Christ.

In either case death is imminent. Moses speaks within ten days, Christ within twenty-four hours, of that end of being.

How different the tone ! how instructive the contrast ! All is as it ought to be, with each, with both, if Moses, if Christ, came from God ; the one with a revelation of law, the other with a revelation of grace and truth.

There is something deeply pathetic in that

must. I must die—I must not go over : but ye shall go over. It is the language of bitter disappointment. It speaks of a life's hope, it speaks of a life's work, defeated and frustrated as regards the person. It tells a sad tale, of prayer unheard, at last silenced. Moses had besought the Lord, saying, *O Lord God, Thou hast begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness and Thy mighty hand—I pray Thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon.* But the Lord, he says to the rebellious people, *was angry with me for your sakes, and would not hear me.* The lawgiver was bearing, in his day, the provocations of his people ; suffering, in a certain sense, for them. They had angered his spirit ; they had depressed and daunted for a moment his invincible faith ; they had drawn from him that *unadvised saying*, that word of irritation, of impatience, almost of unbelief, by which he had failed to *sanctify God before*

them, and had brought upon himself a sentence of exclusion which seemed to make the very mission a failure and a contradiction. *They that bear the vessels of the Lord must be exceptionally clean: the life must be exemplary, or else the punishment. The Lord said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward and northward and southward and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan. But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over. I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan: but ye shall go over—ye, for whose sakes God was angry with me—and possess that good land.*

Mysterious, all of it—yea, all of God's dealings. The innocent suffer here with, and even for, the guilty. There is no proportion, there is no adjustment, in this life, of the destinies of

good and evil. We draw from the very disproportion, from the very injustice, of the present, an argument for a future restitution, refreshing, and rectification. But Moses could not yet see this. To bring immortality to light was not his office. And though we cannot doubt that one brought so exceptionally near to God, one endued with so large a measure of God's grace and blessing, must have had in him an instinct of immortality; must have felt that he was wrapped round and enveloped with that indestructible being which is the attribute of all who approach and touch and live in the Divine; still, inasmuch as *the way into the holiest of all* was not yet manifested, only typified and prefigured, in the Dispensation to which he ministered, we can well perceive why earth should have been more to him than it need be, or ought to be, to the Christian; why he should have struggled and wrestled against the sentence, in the only way in which God's true-

hearted servants ever do wrestle—namely, in *prayer and supplication with strong crying and tears*; why, when prayer itself was silenced by express refusal and prohibition, he should still have smarted and writhed under a judgment to which he bowed; and here, on the very threshold of eternity, in this last and most thrilling adieu to his work and to his own, should have left on record, in words of deepest grief and humiliation, the sentence of his shame and of his loss, *But I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan.*

Brethren, disappointment is a large word in human life. Its experiences begin early. The disappointments of childhood are as keen as they are transitory. The mere postponement of a pleasure is sharp pain. How much more those disappointments—and they begin in youth—which mark the difference, in prospect, between a distinguished and a commonplace life; the loss, for example, of a University

prize, of a College emolument, which has been the omen, the instrument too, of magnificent success to the giants and heroes of young imagination; the discovery, thus made or made otherwise, that ours are not the talents of the few but of the many; that we must content ourselves, in all probability, for a lifetime, with humble aims, slow advancements, and average rewards; must see rivals outstrip us every day not by merit but by gift, and reconcile ourselves, if we would not become odious, to an uninteresting course and a nameless memory! How many do I address, in this Church, whose Profession has been a failure! who would gladly turn aside—and yet even this is denied them—into any alley or by-path of business in which, unknown and unhonoured, they might *eat a piece of bread*.

But there are disappointments of a higher rank and order than these, in proportion as the soul has dominated the life, and the cause of

God has displaced from the throne of the being the self-interest and the self-aim. Such are those failures to reform, to redress, to reclaim, to regenerate; those baffling, daunting experiences of the patriot, the philanthropist, the pastor, the Evangelist; those refusals of the boon earnestly asked, those castings out of the very prayer and supplication, those silencings, by God Himself, of the voice of entreaty and of intercession—of which the history of this mighty man of old contains so memorable an illustration. These disappointments derive their chief bitterness from the severe trial of faith which is involved in them. The cause was God's cause—and yet it was defeated. The method was God's method—and yet it was ineffective. The soul so perseveringly begged of Him would not be, was not, won back. The child of prayer became a castaway. The dark places of vice and misery and cruelty would not be shone into by the

light of the Gospel. The life that was all God's was cut short in its usefulness ; and the work to which, for which, it was given, seemed to derive, neither from the life, nor from the death, any decisive impulse or influence. What shall we say to these things ? We all know the answers, of reconciliation or of palliation, ready on all lips, yet in the hour of need seldom found satisfying to the heart. We know what man—compassionate, religious man—would bid us answer to ourselves in these emergencies : yet somehow the word floats, hums, buzzes around us ; it will not enter, it will not accost, it will not comfort, the heart.

In proportion to the devotion is the disappointment. It is easy for the man who has given half a heart to God's work, to bear the postponement of its consummation. If he feels the cutting short of his days, it is for himself. He cannot enter into the heart-sickness of that hope deferred which adjourns to an indefinite

to-morrow the realization of designs and efforts in behalf of God and His Church. He may dread that last end, which must for ever stop in mid course the endeavours and enterprises of this life : but it will not be because it deprives him of the beatific vision of God's work perfectly done, or of the entrance of God's people upon the fruition of their inheritance. Such thoughts, such sorrows, are for him, and him only, whose soul has been given to God, and whose life has been one free-will sacrifice in the cause of truth and righteousness. Then, to be taken away, not from the evil, but from the good, about to be manifested ; to find health failing, and power decaying, and life ebbing, just as the long effort of youth and age was on the point of attaining ; to leave to another the passage of that Jordan to the very brink and margin of which he has led his people, and, instead of going over before them, to be bidden to take one last farewell look over a land of

beauty and fertility denied to him in possession —this was the trial of God's servant whose words we are studying: this has been the trial, in all ages, of the pioneers of Gospel progress: this will be our trial, just in proportion as we throw ourselves with keen and earnest interest into the mighty work of God in man's behalf. For the same life, the same man, seldom (in this sense) both sows and reaps. The hindrances to any Divine work are too great and too many to be overcome in one generation. That which we reap must be another's sowing, and that which we sow in tears it shall be for another to reap in joy.

It is well. Doubtless it is well. This puts us in our proper place as creatures and as sinners. This keeps us mindful of our littleness as the one, of our doom as the other. Not on this side of the grave, but on the other, can it be either safe for us, or true, to see the fruit of our toiling. Work itself would become a

snare, if it gave any wages but hope to the labourer who has yet to die. We can bear but little success: *man being in honour* becomes—and it is his safeguard—*like the beasts that perish*. When we have once died and risen again, it will be good for us, sin being put away, to exercise angelic ministries, and feel ourselves, in doing so, like the Angels, to *excel in strength*.

Meanwhile let us reconcile ourselves to a life of disappointment, as much in heavenly things as in earthly, by thoughts at once sobering and comforting. We are not isolated units: we are members of a body. To each one of us is given grace; something to do, and the means of doing it; responsibilities real and grave, opportunities brief but abundant, influences passive and active, relationships ours alone, and which if we exercise not as we ought, none other, absolutely none other, can. Thus the individual has his place assigned him; his place, his work, and his reward. Yet he is

but one link in a long chain, and his happiness lies in remembering it. *There is one body, and one spirit.* The life of the whole is dependent indeed upon the life of the constituent parts, yet no one part must intrude itself into prominent notice, or expect to be recognized in the process or in the end. One by one we die, but the life lives on. The lawgiver disappears, and the warrior succeeds him; himself too to disappear in his turn, making way for judge, and prophet, and king—at last for Him in whom all have their end and their satisfaction. *I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan: but ye shall go over*—ye, the Church, ye, the race—and God will raise you up, age by age, the appropriate leader and ruler and deliverer.

Turn we then from the servant to the Master—from the human to the Divine—from Moses to Christ.

When Christ spoke the words of this day's

Gospel, He was on the very eve of His Passion. He was to suffer, that night, as man, mere man, could not. To the eye of sense His work was far from its completion. What was there, that night, to show for it? A little company of weak, wavering, vacillating disciples; one gone out to betray, another going forth to deny, the rest, all of them, to forsake Him. Who among all God's servants—who in any darkest, most disconsolate age of the Church—ever left a work so incomplete? We, who look back upon these things from the front of history—we, who know what all meant, interpreting by the event and the experience—can scarcely appreciate the majesty of that faith which could go forth to die at that moment. Christ says not, *But I must die*—I must leave these few sheep in earth's wilderness—I must close my ministry—I must go into the valley of the dark shadow, and trust my work with my God. Quite different is His tone, His

feeling. He speaks not of the thing left, but of the Person returned to. *But now I go my way to Him that sent me.* He saw the mission fulfilled—and He saw the heaven opened.

And in these two thoughts lies the cure of all disappointment for the disciple who would be as his Master.

Is the life short, sad, poor, disappointing? Is it full of sorrow, of care, of dullness? Is it a small thing—small in its efforts, smaller in its achievements? Do you hold it by a frail tenure? and are you summoned away from it just when you seemed to be on the point of some success, some fruit, some recompense of reward? Must you leave another to carry across Jordan those whom you had led to it, and to give rest to loved and loving souls of which you had borne through many a cloudy and dark day the cumbrance and the anxiety? Well, but there is One who arranges, who ordains, these things for us all. Christ Him-

self speaks of Him that sent Him; and when the mission, when the apostleship, is over, is not He your Home?

Let us rise, all of us, to this conception—the mission, the apostleship, of this life! Would to God that we could all see ourselves God's sent ones! You know well enough that there is something, that there is some one, for which, for whom, you can do or could have done something. Where is the life so contracted, so isolated, so pitiable, that it has absolutely no one, nothing, in it, but itself? If you have imagined this, reconsider it. We know better. We know that we might have been God's messengers, God's apostles, each of us, to some other, some younger, some poorer, some more ignorant, more miserable one, near to whom it pleased Him to place us. Let this light shine into your life—the light of this thought—and you will be a happier, you will be a better man, instantly.

But suppose that you have realized this, as so many have done in this congregation: and suppose that your trouble is, that your work does not seem to be prospering: or suppose that you are trembling, as so many have trembled before you, lest you should be taken away before it is done; lest you should not live to see the success of that scheme, of that enterprise, of that work, with which you have charged yourself; lest you should leave that undertaking in jeopardy—let us say plainly, that soul unsaved—which you had made your mission, your apostleship, for Jesus Christ below. Think then of Him—how, that night, that awful night—with Gethsemane before Him, and Caiaphas and Pilate and Herod, and the Cross, and the grave, and Hades too, before Him—He was able to sit and converse calmly in that guest-chamber, with those poor ignorant irresolute few, whom He was to leave here below, as sheep among wolves—just because

He felt that God had sent Him, and that God could take charge of His own work.

So then, if God honours you in your generation by giving you what we call an exceptional work ; if He grants you success, makes you a shining light, brings lives, souls, living dying immortal men, to Himself, through your ministry—and I speak to some such to-day—see yourself little in all this, and God alone great ; place yourself first, and then also your work, in His hands ; and when He calls you away from it, done (as you judge) or undone, say only this—*I go to Him that sent me.*

This was what Moses could but half see—this going his way to Him who had given him his commission. It was but a dim half-light that he had, or could have, in his day. Length of days was then the promise, and to be cut short in it was then the punishment. How glorious for him the surprise of that death on

Nebo! that 'kiss of the Lord,' as Jewish writers interpret, which gently absorbed the breath, and took the life into God's life for ever! that burying by the hand of God, which, at once, took him out of the reach of man's idolatry, and marked him as God's peculiar care and oversight! How bright for him that revelation, in Paradise, of the blessed hope and the glorious appearing, from which, long ages afterward, he came forth actually to see and converse with Jesus on the holy mount!

Let us not fall short of that hope, in this later day of God's Church. Let us hold fast the assurance that death shall be gain—gain for all who have first realized the apostleship. We are unbelieving people, the best of us. We still mourn for the dead, almost as those who have no hope. We still—and it is worse—pride ourselves upon this dying life, as though it were the whole of being. Which of us believes in God's presence, as his own rest and

home? Which of us is willing to depart, believing it to be far better? This burdensome soul-crushing life of sense and time—how does it enchain, how does it bewitch us! Live more, I pray you, in the invisible—lest haply, when death comes, you should find yourself a stranger in *that world*. Go apart with God, like Moses, till the face shine with His glory. Then come back to earth, and converse with us. We want these testimonies, these evidences, every one of us, of things unseen. For lack of them, we are poor and naked and earth-bound—give them us! They are the right of Gospel days and Church worshippers. We may all be witnesses, to each other, if we will, of God and Christ, of eternity and heaven. These are *the powers of the world to come*—every Christian may taste of them. These things have no counterfeits. You cannot simulate the peace of God. No multitude of ordinances, no abjectness of pro-

stration, no signs and symbols of devotion, will give it you. One hour, one moment, with God—alone, in the secret chamber, in the desert of sorrow, in the wilderness of desolation—will do more for you, in this respect, than all the rites of all the religions. Up, into the mount ! Wait for Him, watch for Him, there—and when He meets you, say to Him, *I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.* At last, when the great call comes, and ‘all that is not heaven must fade,’ you shall say—not, *I must die* ; not, I must leave work and charge and kindred and home—but, *I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better* ; yea, in the words of Him who in all things left us an example that we should follow His steps, *Now I go my way to Him that sent me.*

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER,
April 28, 1872.

X.

THE LOVE OF GOD.

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart,
and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.—DEUTER-
ONOMY vi. 5.



HIS verse is the meeting-point of the
Law and the Gospel.

It is, of itself, to one who knows anything of the religions and faiths of the world, a conclusive proof of the Divine Legation of Moses. The commandment of love—unbelievers may call it an originality—we call it an inspiration.

It was not until Christ threw a Divine light upon it, that this commandment was seen as the summary, as the whole, of the Law. But it was there : there, to be shone upon ; there, for Christ to discover, to decipher, to develope :

it was there, amidst ordinances apparently carnal ; it was there, amidst precepts apparently mundane ; it was there, amidst rules, permitted rather than commanded, *for the hardness of hearts*, until *the perfect should come* : it was there—and the fact that it was there is a testimony to the system in which it was embodied ; a testimony to the Apostleship of Moses ; a testimony to the identity of the God of the Old Testament with the God of the New.

Very wonderful it must have sounded in the ear of Israel to be bidden to love Jehovah. To be bidden, not, only or chiefly, to fear Him, as the God revealed in lightnings and thunderings and voices on Sinai ; not, only or chiefly, to keep themselves from provoking a wrath so awful, a jealousy so sensitive and so terrible ; but, to love Him ; to love Him, as the whole of duty ; to love Him, notwithstanding, nay, partly because of, His incommunicable glory. It must

have shown them, even them, even that rude and stiff-necked people, that He was a God to be loved; that dread was not His due except from the unloving; that, though the throne might be fenced round with awe and terror, yet to such as had access to it it was a throne already of grace, to which whosoever would might even then come boldly, so long as he would draw nigh with clean hands and contrite heart.

The words are very strong, very touching. *With all thine heart.* Let the feelings, let the affections, let even the emotions, find in God their object, their rest, and their satisfaction. *And with all thy soul.* Let the immortal thing within thee, let the everlasting being which thou art, come out towards this Lord God, and devote itself, in the central life, in the moving will, to Him as its Creator, to Him as its Owner, to Him as its Father, its Saviour, its Comforter. *And with all thy might.* Not with the feeblest, but with the mightiest of all thy

faculties, of thought and speech and action; with the mightiest of all, at their mightiest; in a devotion of which man is the priest and self the sacrifice.

Wonderful, every word of it, as addressed, in the infancy of their nationality, to a nation sensuous and earth-bounded! Wonderful, scarcely less, to us, children of the Bible and of the Gospel, so slow to recognize our own greatness; so prone to live below privilege, and to resent rather than to respond to the trumpet-call of Jesus Christ!

The precept of Love follows upon the revelation of Unity. *Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord . . . Jehovah, our Elohim, one Jehovah . . . And thou shalt love Jehovah thy Elohim with all thy heart.* How deep, how true, how strong the coupling! The heathen could not love his *Gods many*. The very plurality, if nothing else, distracted, dissipated, destroyed the loving. It is so still. Love is a

jealousy. Not, indeed, the love of country or kinsfolk or friends. In such aspects, the very manifoldness may strengthen. One love cements another. This is because such affections want, rather than refuse, a spring and a centre. No man loves his friend the less for loving his mother, or his home the less for loving his school, or his country the less for loving his Church. These affections may be strongest where they are most. The very fact of cherishing one may make another dearer and tenderer and more steadfast. But where love is in any true sense a devotion, there it must be, more or less, a jealousy. There it must ascribe to its object something which none other, for it, is or can be. The unity is a condition. Polytheism cannot love. It is because the Lord thy God is one Lord—has in Himself all perfection, shares with none, is all essentially, and by a right prior to created being—therefore thou shalt love Him with thy heart, with thy soul, with thy might.

Two things lie on the surface of the text.

The first is, the testimony here borne to God.

He suffers, He bespeaks, He desires, love. I know we must guard the word spoken. He wants us not, as to His blessedness. If we had never been ; if the One Lord had dwelt alone, with the Son and with the Spirit, in mysterious self-contained Unity ; He had lacked nothing. Yet, guard the word as we may, there is in Him—there was, it may be, in creating, there is, certainly, toward the thing made—a yearning—the phrase is Scriptural—a yearning for love. Brethren, that yearning is in the noblest, the loftiest, the purest, of human hearts. For lack of it, for lack of the reciprocity which shall satisfy, holy men and women, beautiful as God made them, as God has re-made them—beautiful not least in this, that they have a boundless capacity of, and an exhaustless thirst for, loving—go through this world—they shall not go

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through that—conscious of, tortured by, yet bending submissively to, a want, a pain, a privation—it is that of love. We do not account them weak for it: rather it is their strength. It may become a weakness; as when the denied human love spends itself upon an animal—or goes lower, and, driven in, becomes a disease, a hardness, a misanthropy. It is not the love which is disease—no, nor the demand for love. Men have learned, in the School of God, how to use the frustrated love, which else had degenerated into vice or hate. God has taken it, and, fulfilling it in Himself, has taught them how to express it also, and to hand it on. It is a part of their noblest self—nay, it is the noblest. It is the ‘likest God.’ For He too desires love. The text says so. We dare not define the why or the how. We dare not say—when we presume to speak of One so high above us—that He Himself, for Himself, wants it. Sure we are, that is

not the reason, but something far nobler and more unselfish, and more disinterested, for His claiming it. Still we do believe—partly because it exalts Him in our esteem to believe it—that to be loved, loved by us His poor, helpless, sinful, dying ones, is dear to the heart of God : and if it be because He knows it to be so good for us, that does not lower, that rather enhances, the glory of His desiring love.

We say then, first, that the text is a testimony to what God is. He asks our love. What an idea must this give of His character ! We all know how it draws us towards a man, to know that, being active, and being manly, and being strong, and supporting many burdens of care and work and thought and responsibility, he also has a warm heart ; nay, even is womanly in his tenderness ; craves affection ; is touched by the response of gratitude ; loves love ; has even a void place within till love fills it. Does this put the man lower,

does it not raise him, in your esteem? Do you not feel how gladly you would yourself be to him that which he lacks? The tenderness is the complement of the strength. Add but one third thing, purity, and you have indeed that threefold cord of perfection which is not quickly broken.

Brethren, there is something of this—we presume not to say just what, or just how—but there is something of this in God. When He says, *Thou shalt love me*, I say that it adds something quite new, quite unique, to anything that we could have learned of His wisdom, of His power, or of His holiness. Yes, there is something there, in that Divine heart, which I can not only adore, or trust, or obey—there is something which I can love. I infer this from His asking for it.

Surely then the same text testifies also to man. We say, and say truly, that there has been a fall, that there is a ruin, that there is

a corruption, a depravity, utter and desperate, in man born of a woman. It is true. Let alone, we perish. Nothing but a miracle of grace can save us. But that miracle is. I read it here—Fallen man, love thy God! What! I, a wretched sinful man—I, who have done all this wickedness—I, who have no strength of myself so much as to call upon God—I, whose very prayer seems to be so stifled within me that it never gains egress from the smoke and din of this earth, much less ingress into the pure blessed heaven where God is—I, am I bidden to love God? The very word, the very command, is life from the dead. There are some things made possible by the demand. When Christ said to the paralytic man, *Stretch forth thy hand*, the strength came in the word. It is so here. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God*. Impossible! Nay, God mocks not. He who knows thy frame, He who sees thee through and through, in thy vice and in

thy ruin, He it is who speaks to thee. He bids thee love. He wants thy love. Shall He not make it possible? Shall He not accept it?

And what is this love which God asks of us? Why does He call it love? Brethren, the love which God seeks is not different in kind, it differs only in direction, from that which we give one to another. Think what love is, as you give it to your nearest and best-beloved. Think of it in its spring in the heart; think of it in its course day by day; think of it as it prompts the word and the act that shall give pleasure; think of it as it makes presence a delight and separation a sorrow; think of it as it wrings from your soul the sob of anguish when you have vexed or wounded or wronged the object of it—and there, in those experiences common to all of us, you have the affection, the one, only, unmistakable affection, which God Himself, using man's tongue and hand and thought, here calls love. Let no man deceive

you with vain words, when he would carry the whole matter into some region high above you, and say that the love of the Invisible God must differ in nature from that which we have all felt as love toward the created. The love which God bespeaks is that very feeling which makes you hurry back to your home from a journey—and encroach upon night-hours that you may write that letter which is the communion of the absent—and thrill with a joy which cannot deceive, when you casually meet, eye to eye and heart to heart, one from whom years and lands and all save thoughts have divided you—and weep bitter tears at the grave of him whom disease or accident, consumption or drowning, have torn from you prematurely—the love, I say, is this love—no colder or calmer, no duller or less exciting—when God, not man, is its object. It is false, it is mischievous, it is cruel, to tell you that the love of God has of course no zest and no sparkle, no thrill and no throb,

in it; that it would be irreverent to speak to God in accents of delight or of enthusiasm; that it would be superstitious to look for an answer when your correspondence is with Him, or for a glow of satisfied longing when you enter that Holy of Holies where you draw nigh to His mercy-seat; that, in short, when God asks your heart, not pleasure, but duty, is the thing spoken of, and to offer Him feeling, or passion, or admiration, would be to affront rather than to obey Him who speaks and deals with us from on high. Love is love, or nothing. When God speaks, He uses man's voice—and the thing which He asks of us is the thing which He says. *We write none other things unto you*, an Apostle says, *but what ye read and acknowledge*: even so, when God writes, all is plain and clear, legible and intelligible to the reader.

We find great assistance in this thought. Love is love—a thing deeper than word, in-

tolerant of definition : it has its instinct, it has its intuition—and of this thing God speaks when He asks it.

And now reflect with us, for a moment, upon the mighty consequences and inferences of this demand. See how it deals with life—the life of men, the life of nations—in so far as it is received.

(1) There is a thirst, in all of us, for liberty. Some men idolize liberty ; care not if it run to licence ; abhor, not tyranny alone, but authority ; ask, *Who is lord over us ?* or mingle truth and falsehood, saying, Even in religion there can be no obligation. See in this text how God offers liberty. He bids us love. He would make us free by one great Abolition Act. He would strike off the fetters of religion itself. He would change the very idea of it. He would say, No number of services, and no amount of sacrifices, and no exactness of observances, and no punctuality of abstinences,

can of themselves avail anything towards my favour and blessing: as such, they are beside the mark: they may even mislead: they do not even point heavenward till they have life put into them by something else—and that other, that transforming thing, is love. Love God, and you are holy—love God, and you are free.

I know there is a risk here. Men may say, Then, till love comes—and I have it not yet—I can do nothing. All religion, all duty, all obedience, must wait for that which is not. In vain do I toil, in vain do I struggle with sin, in vain do I worship, in vain do I pray, till there is that in my heart which there is not. This is Antinomianism. This is licence indeed. Duty is duty, and religion is religion—only, we say again, And love is love. Sometimes love has been reached through duty. The very endeavour to obey has placed the soul in the attitude for loving. The not loving is in large part due to a bad conscience. ‘To hate the injured’

is a proverb of earth—it has an aspect also towards heaven. We cannot break God's law, and not dislike God. Dreadful is the saying, yet true. Therefore, for many, the obvious rule is the right. Cleanse your hands from evil, cleanse your lives from sin—and then you can love. Only we would earnestly press upon you and upon ourselves, that there is such a thing as beginning with love. There is a resolving to love, which is its own fulfilment. God speaks as though we could do it. Love me—yea, with all thy heart! Surely He is worthy. Perhaps some one answers, Yes, too worthy: I could better love the imperfect. Is it so? Was goodness ever the cause of not loving? Was it not rather some defect of goodness—some rigidity, some sternness, some fault-finding, some censoriousness, which was no part, which was the opposite, of goodness? If God is all love, be sure that He is lovely! Know Him, and you shall love: seek Him, and you shall know.

And then, with love, liberty. No longer the question, How much ? and, What must I ? No longer the anxious careworn treading, which fears to trespass, yet would. No longer the spirit of bondage, ever dreading the wrath of the taskmaster if the tale of bricks be not fulfilled. No longer the counting of services, on Sunday and week-day, by Church rule or family custom. 'Love God, and do what thou wilt,' is a saying more than half true. Love makes labour light, and he who loves God is God's free man.

(2) There is another cry of the age—and that is, equality. An impatience of differences ; a levelling of ranks, an obliteration of distinctions, clamoured for on the one side—on the other, half-yielded, half-resisted ; selfishness resisting—vanity, whether the vanity which would discern, or the vanity which would lead, or the vanity which would please, this echoing the cry, and yielding. This is one cry of equality.

Another is the impatience of God's inequalities—those, I mean, which He keeps in His own power ; differences of constitution, of fortune, of circumstance ; differences which make one man prosperous and another unsuccessful—one man rich, in advantage, in possession, even in love ; another poor, in these things, to destitution.

Now we see how the offer of God's love, how the demand of the love of God, bears upon all these things. If all may have this—and if nothing but this can satisfy, nothing but this endure, or give peace, or survive death—where is inequality ? Where, in a moment or two, will it be ? Is it an impossible lesson to learn, if these things be true, to rise above circumstance, and by rising to rest ? to feel, as well as to say, I love God, and what He does is best ? to cease to envy and grudge—at last, with truth at once and charity, to pity the man who has his good things here ? to pray,

certainly, without ceasing, for that love of God's commands, that desire of God's promises, which, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, shall fix our hearts where true joys are to be found? Here is an equality, not of name, but of fact, in which there is room for all the world, and in which no man sinks by another's rising.

(3) It is needless, yet delightful, to record, in harmony with the last reflection, the operation of this love of God upon the unity of the human brotherhood. Philanthropists, as well as revolutionists, talk much of fraternity. Christians know that brotherhood hangs upon fatherhood; that only they who love from the heart *Him that begat*, will ever love from the heart *the begotten of Him*. For lack of this deeper, this higher affection, schemes and systems of human pacification fail one by one, pass, and are succeeded. Counterfeits are many—the reality is one. Christ stated it in

its breadth and in its simplicity, when He said, *The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind and with all thy strength. And the second is like unto it, namely, this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.* Sever them, invert them, and they lose all. Say, as some have said, I cannot love God, but I will love my brother: or say, I love God—between me and my Maker there is concord—but it is vain, it is impossible, in this great bad world, for one poor unit to do ought for sinning suffering millions: say thus, or say thus, and you have divorced those two loves which God hath joined in one; you have taken away the motive love, which is the love of God—or you have taken away the echo love, which is the love of man.

Pray to Him, as you kneel to-day at that

holy Table, where a love stronger than death *draws with cords of a man*, that He will pour into all our hearts such love towards Him, that, loving Him above all things, we may do and suffer with a glad heart all His will, and after death have the fruition of His glorious Godhead, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER,
May 5, 1872.

XI.

THE WORD VERY NIGH.

The word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart.—DEUTERONOMY xxx. 14.

NOT hidden, and not far off. Not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, *Who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it unto us ?* Not beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, *Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it ?*

No—the word is very nigh thee. It is in thy mouth, prompt for utterance : it is in thy heart, ready for faith. See, I have set it before thee this day, in its plain, its solemn alternative, *life and good—or else, death and evil.*

That which Moses, consecrating the last ten days of life to the rehearsal of God's Law to his

people, says here of a Dispensation of type and precept and prophecy, St Paul applies in a very striking manner to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. He seems almost to deny to Moses the use of his own words. He is almost jealous of this praise of the Law, as a revelation clear and direct and plain and unambiguous, and would transfer the saying altogether to the *dispensation of the fulness of times*. To Moses he will leave only the colder and tamer and less attractive description, *The man which doeth these things shall live by them*. It is the *righteousness of faith*, he says, *which speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven—as though to bring Christ down? or, Who shall descend into the abyss—as though to bring Christ back, crucified, not yet risen, from Hades and from the dead? The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart; even the word of faith, which we preach.*

The turn thus given to the passage before us is in many ways remarkable. It represents the to and fro of the sinner's reasonings as he ponders with himself the possibility of salvation. It sets him full in view, in that life-like portraiture of which St Paul, taught of God, is a master, searching for the searcher who shall explore heaven for a Saviour. It represents him again, at a later stage in his history, when he has heard of a Christ crucified, and when he is not yet assured of a Christ risen. He who took upon Him to deliver man is still lying, for this particular soul, in the *abyss* of the departed. He has still to be brought back from that death which He died for us men and for our salvation. And then, in the midst of these vain, these futile searchings, a voice comes to him with the restful, the reposeful tidings, Have then thy wish! *The word is very nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart*—the word in which thou wast catechized; the word which thou

wast made to utter at thy mother's knee, while the heart was tender, and while thou knewest not, in thy blessed blissful blindness, the sophistries of the sceptic ; the word which thou hast no need to search after, in heaven or Hades, but only to make thine own, as it lies there, unrealized, in the secret of thy conscience and of thy soul—that, *if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and (as the condition of this confession) believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

It is not necessary for us to-day, my brethren, to adjust the conflicting claims of Paul and Moses, of Gospel and Law, to the utterance which is our text. It may be, that we ought to learn here a more appreciative lesson concerning the Mosaic Dispensation itself. The Book of Psalms, the Book of Isaiah, of Jere-

miah, of Ezekiel, of Daniel, may show us that there is not that divorce and discord between God's earlier and God's later utterances, which superficial theologians would make absolute. There was a *righteousness of faith* doubtless even under the Law. There is a righteousness of faith everywhere where there is true religion. Let us use the text to-day for education in that righteousness, as pointing out one particular in God's revelations ; namely, that they come nigh to us ; that they do not stand afar off, needing to be sent for, and searched for, and waited for, but rather dwell with us and abide with us, ready for conviction, ready for guidance, ready for satisfaction.

1. There are some persons so impressed, so bewildered, so awe-struck, by the thought of the solemnity, the majesty, of things Divine, that they spend a lifetime in wonder, in vague idle suspense, concerning the true and the certain and the positive ; gazing up, like the

disciples on Ascension-day, only not stedfastly (like them) but hesitatingly, into heaven, till something shall happen, so to say, to convince them that God hath spoken, that God hath done, anything whatever for our instruction and for our rescue. It is lamentable, it is pitiable, to know that even amongst our worshippers thousands and tens of thousands are still practically in search of a Christ. Men say to them, *Lo here*, or *Lo there*—and however senseless, however silly the utterance, still heads turn, and hearts flutter, if haply this may be the promised one. There is nothing within ready with the answer, I have my Christ, and I know that there is none other, none beside, without, or above Him.

Brethren, we do feel that there is a danger of taking religion too easily; of resting too implicitly in the faith of the nursery and the schoolroom, of the Baptism and the Confirmation. It is not enough, we know, just to hear

the woman say, *Come, see a man which told me all that ever I did*, without ever hearing Him for ourselves and knowing. It is not doing honour to God, no, nor to ourselves as God has made us, to acquiesce in a religion which we have never realized. There is a passing—it is the crisis of the soul's life—from a faith of hearsay to a faith of conviction; and we cannot counsel any man to dispense with it. For lack of it, we have Churches crowded with hearers who are not even communicants, and loud professions of religion contradicted every day by the lives of the religious.

It is not to excuse any man from the pains, from the pain, of this transition—it is rather to aid him in a realization of truth, always difficult, always anxious, always precarious—that we would address, to you and to ourselves, this day, the inspired admonition, *The word is very nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart*. Suffer not yourselves to miss God's highest gift by

the very fact that it is a revelation ; that it is a lifting of the veil, by the hand of God, from something which lay before in the secret place where God dwells. How true is it, that it is not the difficulty, it is often the simplicity, of the Word, which makes the stumbling-block ! We are saying, Who shall ascend for us ? and lo, the Saviour has descended ! We are saying, Who shall cross the sea for us, or, Who shall penetrate the abyss of death and Hades, that we may at last know the secrets of that prison-house, and talk with the Man who has talked with God ? when, all the time, Jesus Christ is alive again from the dead, and bids us just hear and read for ourselves the words of eternal life.

Brethren ! the Gospel of God would be no Gospel for the race, if it were not simple. This is its peculiarity. It must heal the spring of human life, before the river parts itself into the four streams. If it is to be God's remedy

for man's ill, it must be as powerful for poverty and ignorance and childhood and misery, as for wealth and wisdom and age and happiness. It must go down to the primeval rock of man's nature, and lay its foundation there—below the distinctions of Greek and Barbarian, male and female, slave and free. It must be a word to wise and unwise, to busy and leisurely, to citizen and rustic, to philosopher and babe. In short, the text must describe every real revelation of God to His creatures—*The word is very nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart.*

The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ bears this mark of Divinity. If it be true, it is indeed the panacea of human life. Does it not come home to you in the very heart of your being? Where is he who wants it not? Where is he who does not feel that, if these things be so—if the Bible is God's Word—if Jesus Christ said those things which the Gospels say He said, and knew them, from God,

to be true—then, then first, it is a blessing to be alive? then, then first, death, that venomous serpent lurking in the way before us, has lost its sting—because here is the message of pardon, and here is the motive and strength and gift of holiness; here is the call, Come ye that toil, and rest; here is the promise, I will open heaven, not to the sinless, but to all who will wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb?

The word is in thy heart. Try it by experience, try it by conscience; try it by hope, try it by fear; try it by life, try it by death: it goes to the root of the matter—believe it, and thou art saved.

Say not in thine heart, any more, Who shall go up for me into heaven? God has come down to thee, in His Son and in His Spirit; the living God is now shown to thee as thy Father and thy Saviour and thy Comforter: not to make search idle, not to make effort

presumptuous, not to supersede, or to make needless, one eager longing, one fervent aspiration, one hungering, thirsting, heart-wrung prayer ; not to render the disciple or the pastor, the priest or the evangelist, idle in studying God's mysteries ; not to say to one earnest, devout, praying soul, Spare thy labour, thou seekest, thou toilest, thou spendest zeal and strength, in vain : only to make the searching certainly successful because entirely believing ; only to teach the searcher how to search in as well as after God ; only to cast heaven's own light upon the watcher, and to assure the upward gazer that the Jesus who is gone shall as surely come.

The word is very nigh thee. Yes, even while thou studiest, it is within thee. Even while thou watchest sleeplessly for the dawning of the day, the light is risen upon thee, and Angels of God are already passing between God above and Christ and Christ's below. *Who is He, Lord,*

that I might believe Him? . . . Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee.

We believe, my brethren, that this nearness of God's Revelation to the heart has a truth, not only for the Revelation as a whole, but for its items and particulars of doctrine. There may be over-statements here. We may exalt the verifying faculty into a position not only superior but fatal to Revelation itself. Yet, as no one will really deny that God does address Himself in Revelation to something within us; something which He set within us, in Creation, that it might be His ear, that it might be the organ of hearing when it should please Him to speak to us concerning truth or duty; so, in reference to that speaking, the ear rightly trained becomes very expert in discerning; the real word is distinguishable from the false by its awakening an echo, by its receiving a response, within, which the other, even if it used an Angel's tongue, even if it

spoke in Scripture phrase, cannot stimulate into utterance. When Satan tempted, he used God's Word, God's promise ; quoted accurately from God's Book ; and yet it was a temptation, and the holy and blessed Saviour repelled and repudiated it on the instant. So will it be with us, in proportion to the nearness and closeness of our walk with God, whenever doctrine fanciful, unwholesome, or mischievous, is presented to us, in the systems of man's device, as the clearest intimation, or the most express statement, of God's Word or Christ's Gospel. The true word is *very nigh thee*. It carries its own evidence to the Christian. It witnesses its origin to the witness within. That which is merely curious, that which is merely speculative—still more, that which is hard, harsh, uncharitable—still more, that which would make God unjust or man irresponsible—cannot be a real part, thus stated, of the inspired Revelation, if only because it is not in the heart,

however it may be in the mouth ; because it has no answering voice within, and no assured home amongst the truths which *dwell in unity* in the conscience. It is well for us to try by this test the several doctrines which make up our theology. Keep nothing as a word of God, which does not come nigh thee ; nothing which does not find thee out in conscience, stir thee up in life, and quicken thee in the love of God and man. Other things may be held in suspense ; as when Scripture seems to speak, and no other Scripture, as yet, seems to gainsay ; or as when men older, wiser, godlier, say thus, and it would be presumptuous to assert the opposite : but, as a rule, try all doctrine by the heart, and count nothing known till it has its answering echo there.

2. The word of Revelation, of unveiling God's secrets of grace and salvation, is also, in the last place, a word of direction.

And the text says, here also, a plain word.

The wayfaring man, however simple, need not err therein.

It is true, brethren, it is true. We know, indeed, that there are many walking in darkness as to the way of duty. The complications of life are many. The right and the wrong are sometimes strangely blended. Not only pleasure and duty, inclination and conscience, ease and charity—that we are prepared for—but, kindness and firmness, gentleness and uprightness, love and truth, are sometimes, apparently, in direct antagonism. Sometimes the good of souls entrusted to us, the welfare of brothers whose keepers we are, the interest of imperilled strugglers after light and duty, seems to point one way; seems to demand tenderness, concession, compromise—and yet the inward monitor bids us be strong and very courageous in disregarding the apparent for the sake of the real. In our own lives, sometimes, so small a divergence would make so immense a difference; so micro-

scopic an obliquity would bring so immeasurable a gain; so infinitesimal a wrong would produce so vast a harvest of good—that the mental sight is all but distorted, and nothing could keep it true, but a perfectly ~~un~~available resolution to be the very confessor and martyr and victim of right. All this is so; may have been found so in the past, may be found so in the far or near future, by any of you; and yet the very stating of the ambiguity has shown that it exists but for the crooked; that, even in these most trying experiences, *the word is very nigh thee* if the heart be honest, if the mouth that has to give sentence is set resolutely against the lie.

Moses said to Israel, Christ says to us, The word of direction is in thy heart. It was the very object of His departure to make it so. Very helpful, very comforting, was it for His disciples, to have Him present with them in the body. *While I was with them*, He says

Himself, *I kept them in the truth.* Yet He says also, *Nevertheless I tell you the truth : it is expedient for you that I go away.* Till He departed, the word might be with them, but it was not in them. That more intimate presence of the guiding Word waited for the coming, after His departure, of the Holy Spirit. It was the special promise of the Gospel Dispensation, that then, then first in the truest and deepest sense, God would write His law upon the mind, upon the heart. God would make the will of man move in harmony with the Divine. He would anticipate the enquiry, *What is written?* by the earlier and more spontaneous question, *What is willed?* *Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?* No longer a doing and an abstaining, each by constraint, each in the instance, not by the moving of the whole man, but by the calculation of consequences threatened and promised—the life of God's servant now is an influence and an inspiration ;

the word without has become a word within ; the heart believes unto righteousness, and the mouth, as of course, confesses unto salvation.

These things are of God in Jesus Christ. Whosoever will may drink of this water, which is the living and quickening Spirit. My brethren, let us stir up ourselves, let us provoke one another, to receive this unspeakable gift ! It is this which makes a Christian. It is the possession of Christ's Spirit. We may have all else ; we may believe in the Atonement—we may be jealous for the Bible—we may *do many things*, live useful lives, follow things honourable and of good report : yet, if we have not the Holy Ghost, if we seek not, cherish not, guard not, by most earnest prayer and watchfulness, that blessed Presence, the Presence of a Divine Friend and Guide and Comforter, sealing us as God's servants and God's children, of whom all men may thus take knowledge that they belong to Jesus—if we have not this,

we have missed the Gospel gift ; we are still standing abroad on the open storm-swept plain of Nature and of the Fall, with no safe refuge in the hour of temptation, and no everlasting home in the day of judgment. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* With that Divine promise sounding once again this day in the ear of our hearts—that promise which tells of strength out of weakness, and light out of darkness, and rest out of disquietude, and at last life out of death — how, how shall we make excuse *if we neglect so great salvation ?*

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION DAY,
May 12, 1872.

XII.

THE GRIEF OF THE SPIRIT.

And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.—EPHESIANS iv. 30.

SO practical is Christian doctrine. Revelation has two parts; a premise of fact, and a conclusion of practice.

Would to God that the Church, that the man, always read it so! We, in God's Church of England, have no excuse for misreading Revelation.

These holy festivals, spread over half the year, are all celebrations of events. All, with one grand exception: and it also, rightly interpreted, is a commemoration of fact—in that larger sense of the word in which one Book of

Holy Scripture applies it to all explicit and emphatic utterances of the living God ; saying, as it stands in the original, *that by two immutable facts, God's promise and God's oath, wherein it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.*

But Whit-Sunday is the commemoration of a fact in the commoner sense.

Marvellous, miraculous, mysterious too ! For how can God interpose, authoritatively, without marvel ? How can God introduce a new system, a new dispensation, without miracle ? How can God manifest Himself to hearts and souls without mystery ? We pause for an answer. Revelation is miracle. It would not be revelation, if it involved no departure from common processes of reflection and discovery. You will find, if you press the question, that the man who discards miracle discards revelation too ; uses 'inspiration' in a sense merely rheto-

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rical ; in a sense in which it would be equally suitable to a felicitous guess or a magnificent poem. We who mean by 'Nature' God's common working, mean nothing more by 'miracle' than God's exceptional working. And we find just as many difficulties, just as many improbabilities, in the one as in the other. In some respects less and fewer in Revelation than in Providence. No Gospel miracle has any shock in it for the conscience. Incarnation, Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost—each one is healing, harmonizing, reassuring, comforting. Each one meets a definite want, and redresses a conscious grievance. Each one is exactly according to an instinctive idea of what God, if He be God, must be. Each one is beauty, is power, is wisdom, is love. At present we cannot so well see these features, these footsteps of God, in Providence. Miracle is less marvellous, to heart and soul, than is Nature.

Yet what can be more natural—if we take in the moral as well as the physical—than the miracle of Pentecost? The soul is perishing for lack of God; for want of that comfort and that strength and that holiness which is only in God; for want of that union of heart and life with the Creator which sin has interrupted. And here, as on this day, says the Bible, God crowned the fabric of man's restoration by sending forth His Holy Spirit to take public possession of a Church purchased by a Saviour's blood. You will say, A spiritual process, and moreover a gradual process, like that of sanctification, needed not, admitted not, was inconsistent with, a public inauguration. You will say, In proportion as the scene on the day of Pentecost was more impressive to the eye and ear of sense, in the same degree is it more inconceivable that God, who is a Spirit, should have arranged it as the evidence of a spiritual communication. Such *à priori* reasonings

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have landed modern scepticism in explanations of the Christian Pentecost quite as preposterous as they are insulting. We take the record as it stands in Holy Scripture ; not only because it is the faith of the Church, but also because it accounts for phenomena otherwise unintelligible. We know something from themselves, something from their confessed antecedents, as to the inadequacy of the original disciples, when their Master left them, to propagate a faith which has created a Christendom and changed the face of the world. We know what they were, and we know also what they have done. The connecting link between the two—strong enough to couple them, if it be true—is the event of this season. If Christ's promise was thus fulfilled ; if the Holy Spirit of God descended upon them, as on this day, with signs visible and audible, startling to others, indubitable to themselves ; if by His personal presence He satisfied their souls, in-

formed their minds, possessed their energies, transformed their lives, so that they were indeed made out of weakness strong, and out of wavering stedfast, and out of timidity brave, and out of carnality spiritual; then all is explained, which, whether thus or otherwise, demands explanation—is a fact, as much for the infidel as for the Christian—namely, the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with tangible influences upon men and nations, through all these following centuries, and in all the dominant parts of God's earth. To us it is nothing incongruous, that in those first days God should have marked His Spirit's presence by convincing, constraining evidences. If it pleased Him to make wind and fire His ministers; if it pleased Him to enable human lips to frame sounds, vocal to the hearer, unintelligible to the speaker; if it pleased Him thus to authenticate the gift of wisdom and grace by a gift also of utterance and power; we

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see nothing here which should hinder acceptance: we see only that Omnipotence which works daily in matter, applied to the service of a love which for our sakes would have course and be glorified.

Listen, brethren, to St Paul's account of it, as he speaks here, from his Roman prison, to his own converts at Ephesus. Like us, they had not personally known that first Pentecost in Jerusalem. They had had a Pentecost of their own.

Twenty years after the event of this season, they were found by Paul at Ephesus, called 'disciples,' yet ignorant of it. To his question, *Did ye receive the Holy Ghost on believing?* they answer, *We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost*—whether (they meant to say) that mighty gift of the Spirit, of which Prophets of old prophesied so gloriously, has yet been fulfilled to God's Church. By some strange accident—by a

chain of unaccountable circumstances, such as sometimes leave a man in ignorance of facts or truths which to his nearest neighbour are familiar—these (so called) disciples, like the great Apollos at Ephesus before them, *knew only the baptism of John*; were unacquainted with the full manifestation of Him whom John heralded: and it was not until they were rebaptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, that Paul, by solemn imposition of hands, called down upon them the full Pentecostal gift, attested there, as in the beginning, by special gifts of supernatural power. *They spake with tongues, and prophesied.*

This was the nucleus of that Church to which St Paul, some eight years afterwards, addressed the touching and thrilling letter—touching and thrilling, to spiritual readers—of which one verse is now open before you. Evidently he had directly in view that baptism, that twofold baptism, of water and of the

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Spirit, which, in their case, had been so fruitful.

He calls it a sealing. God had then authenticated their calling. He had marked them for His own. You perceive how exaggerated a phrase this would have been for that sort of Baptism which leaves no mark. St Paul might have called the cross made on the child's brow in modern Baptism a 'sign'—he could scarcely have called it, if it stopped there, a 'seal'—of God's acceptance or of eventual safety.

We say it, brethren, not to disparage Infant Baptism, which we believe to be most surely according to the mind and institution of Christ; only to forbid resting in it; only to forbid that view of it which would make it a charm or an incantation, instead of regarding it as a pledge of God's love, and a token, to be afterwards realized, of His mighty, His effectual grace.

Where, we ask, is God's seal now? We read in Infant Baptism the free, the inclusive,

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the expansive, Gospel; its openness to all, its adaptation to childhood as well as to age, its marvellous longing and yearning over souls, its glorious freedom, its world-wide compass, its individual appropriation. The seal of Baptism is a seal of Divine love and good will. *Whosoever will, let him take the water of life. Suffer the little children to come to me. The promise is unto you and to your children.* But as a seal of the individual salvation, we cannot, in these days, read here more than the hope or the peradventure.

For the seal, in any strong personal appropriation, we must look later on. Not indeed that any mark can be stronger than this of the height and depth and breadth and length of God's love. Only, inasmuch as we oftentimes see that mark utterly erased afterwards from the individual forehead by a career of profligacy and a deathbed of despair, we must ask for something nearer still and more supporting; some-

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thing which shall rest indeed, with all its weight, and with absolute reliance, on that universal Redemption, to which Infant Baptism bears witness—but which shall also prove the Propitiation for the world's sins to be in deed and in truth the Propitiation for ours, and bring within the soul, which is the man, the mighty act of grace which regenerates and recreates.

Therefore we ask how the life stands at this moment—the outward life, and the inward. Has the great change yet been wrought in you, which opens a world above to the eye before fixed on this? Has the consciousness yet been vouchsafed to you, that you may have all here, and have nothing? that there is an absolute divorce and severance between the thing born of the flesh—however seemly, however intellectual, however moral—and the thing born of the Spirit, and, because so born, therefore tending, struggling, ascending upward? Have you bent the knee of the heart and of the soul to Him

who is seen, as He seeth, in secret, who is ready to do above all that we ask or think, in whose favour is life, and who has already loved, already sought, and already redeemed? Practically—I say not theoretically, but I dare to say practically—that is the sealing; that opening of a direct personal communication between a man and his God; that resolute application, that suppliant appeal, that conscious self-committal, of the sinner, convinced and convicted, to One revealed to him as Almighty to save—that is the sealing which, in an age of names and forms, of unmeant worship and unmeaning profession, most nearly corresponds, in fact if not in theory, to the thing of which Paul wrote, *Ye were sealed unto a day of redemption.*

I know not that it will confuse any one to read here of redemption as a thing future. Elsewhere it is spoken of in the past. *Ye were redeemed*, St Peter writes—and it is one

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passage out of many—with *the precious blood of Christ*. Redemption, wherever it occurs, implies three things—a captivity, and a price, and a deliverance: but sometimes the captivity is that of sin, and the deliverance is that of grace; sometimes the captivity is that of flesh, and the deliverance is that of resurrection. The price, in all cases, is the same: it is Christ Himself, given on the Cross for our sins, raised again from death to be the justification first, and then the life and the resurrection. St Paul never counted the work done, till this hindering, enfeebling, imprisoning body is unclothed and clothed upon. Till then, he himself, who had the firstfruits of the Spirit, yet groaned within himself, looking for redemption; nay, could even cry aloud, in the language, almost of the unredeemed, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

Beloved brethren! we would not leave one

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hearer unaddressed in the solemn appeal which we are to echo this day.

Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

It shall suffice, for this purpose, to remind you of a sealing which belongs to all men.

Let me carry you back, in the power of a memory which may sleep but dies not, to some day of earlier consciousness, when you felt, as perhaps you feel not now, the force of truth and the beauty of holiness. God leaves not Himself, in any of us, all the life long, without witness. It is a mistake to suppose that God selects a favoured few, to be the recipients of His confidences. I do not believe—I would not believe if a man declared it to me—that there worships here this morning one person who has had no dealings, none ever, with the Spring and Fountain of being. With some God has carried on His work gently, tenderly, imperceptibly; has given

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them a life almost all of quietness; has surrounded them, has almost overwhelmed them, with blessings — as though He would say, Canst thou resist, canst thou shut out, love like this? With others He has dealt severely. Doubtless He saw it needful. He never seemed to take away the hand of chastisement. Stroke followed stroke—and the very intervals were gloom, repining, and bitterness. And the man said, If God were a God of love, could He thus thwart and bruise and crush me? And he made it his excuse for a life of comfortless godlessness. He thought it would be better thus, than to kneel and kiss the rod. O blind man! How soon would God have comforted thee, wouldst thou but have taken Him and had Him and kept Him for thy God! No, thou wast not ripe, thou wast not fit, for blessing. And yet the heart that would bless was all the time but just behind the cloud!

Even these—though I know that the word

‘sealing’ is too strong for them—yet, forasmuch as I firmly believe in God’s love to them, even these will I take with me, will they suffer me, in my exhortation, not to grieve the Holy Spirit, who has been striving with them all this time, if they would not let Him seal them.

Yes, all—even they who have but known what conscience was ; even they who have but felt the stab of remorse when they had successfully tempted ; who have but known the agony of that night after sinning, which one wonders in the morning how one has lived through, but which, alas ! one does survive, and forget, and survive again, many hundred times in this strange, wondrous lifetime—even they, surely, can just feel, if it be by an effort, if it be but for a moment, the force of this remonstrance—which sets before us the Holy Spirit of God, first as a Person, and then secondly as a near, a present Person, and then thirdly as a feeling, loving Friend, and in this capacity speaks of Him as

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liable to be grieved by us—more, in proportion as His love has been longer and more deeply known, but in some degree, yes, in some degree by us all—by the worst of us—by those who have very few good desires, and who scarcely ever bring even those to good effect.

There is no day in the Christian year which comes to us with a keener pang of self-reproach than this festival of the Holy Ghost. The love of Jesus is the favourite theme of Christian hearts: they never weary, they ought never to weary, of recounting it. Yet is there another love—I will not say nearer yet or more indefatigable, for it is untrue, it is wrong, thus to create differences where there are none, or to destroy the Unity in exaggerating the Trinity—still there is a love, St Paul expressly calls it *the love of the Spirit*, which seems to come, if it were possible, yet nearer to us than the other; inasmuch as it is that which actually abides not with only but within us; actually bears the

brunt, so to say, of our provocations and backslidings and unaccountable waywardnesses; actually feels, at their source and spring, the hateful ingratitude and malice and impurity and impiety of these cloked and veiled hearts, and suffers, with an intensity proper to Deity, the abominable sinfulness of the sinful. It is this thought to which St Paul appeals when he bids us not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God whereby we are sealed unto a day of redemption.

We have heard, in our day, of Roman Catholic Christians devoting themselves to one and another of God's saints of old time, supposed to have been too much neglected or passed by in the ordinary remembrance or special self-dedication of the faithful. We could share the feeling, if the object of this concentrated religion were the Holy and Blessed Spirit of God. Oh if we could gather into one all the wandering affections which we lavish

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upon the creature, and offer them, whole and undivided, to that Friend of Friends! Oh if we could in any manner repair the long, the utter neglect with which we have returned a love so pure and so longsuffering! How would it consecrate life itself, at its very source and fountain, to have Him for its worship and for its devotion!

Grieve not the Spirit. We know how a loving friend is grieved by mere negligence—by mere indifference to intercourse—by mere forgetfulness to seek and to communicate. Has the Holy Spirit, think we, no sense of our coldness? When He sees us, day after day, forgetting so much as to pray or to give thanks for Him—and yet, all the while, it is He who is guarding us, as we lie down and rise up, as we sit in the house or walk by the way, from utter, absolute, final apostasy, from sins that would obliterate grace and seal damnation upon us—and yet, once more, His love is so infinitely

more tender than that of brother or sister, of mother or wife, inasmuch as it alone is entirely free from all spot or stain of self—must it not grieve Him?

And when He sees us, not only failing to recognize, or failing to seek, but also, day by day, in definite things, disregarding His wishes, stifling His remonstrances, stopping the inward ear against His voice of anxious direction, and counting it a gain if we can go on our way unchecked, untroubled by His loving solicitude—must it not grieve Him? Even when He says to us this day, as He says in all hearts, *The table is spread, and all things are ready*—testifying of Christ in us, and pointing to the memorials of the dying, living Love—in vain; when He sees us hurrying back, as though scattered by sudden tempest, to our homes and our haunts, leaving but a handful of worshippers to complete a worship to which prayers and lessons and hymns and sermon are but the

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porch and the vestibule—can these things be, and the Spirit not be grieved in us?

But most of all, when the Holy Spirit, who is God within us, finds His pleading powerless to restrain us from our sins; when He perceives that the man who last night repented in dust and ashes has gone again to-day after his lusts and after his idols; when he sees day passing, and week, and month, and year, and no real, no true change wrought in us as concerns the predominant frivolities and self-indulgences and vices of the locust-eaten past; when He sees advice and example, warning and punishment, conscience and Gospel, all alike powerless to reform and to regenerate—Oh, brethren, judge in yourselves—you who have known what it is to shed one tear over a friend obstinately self-ruined—what it must be, to the Friend, Divine in His love and in His unselfishness, to behold us running headlong to ruin; to feel, I say, that the Father has loved, and the

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Son has died, and the Spirit through long years has striven for us, with us, in us—and all in vain and for nought!


Let the word be vocal in some ear, in some heart, this day. A few more, if one more, of these Sundays, and the worshipper himself shall be in his coffin and in his grave; gone, as thousands have gone since last Sunday, to give account of his stewardship. The last Sunday of all will be just such as this one; as little monitor, as little predictive, of the night when the man can no more work. Let us arouse ourselves while we may. Let us cry mightily to the Divine Friend, nearer and closer and more loving than any human, praying Him to raise us at last from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, by that new, that spiritual Baptism which is the resurrection of a soul.

WHIT-SUNDAY,
May 19, 1872.

XIII.

THE BENEDICTION OF THE HOLY TRINITY.

Grace be unto you, and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come ; and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne ; and from Jesus Christ.—
REVELATION i. 4, 5.

HE text is a benediction. All Revelation is so. Revelation is the coming forth of the Invisible One to bless the thing made. The last act of the departing Lord—of whom it is written, that, with hands uplifted to bless, He was taken from them and carried up into Heaven—was more than a sign, it was a summary of the work done by Him upon earth, of the work to be done by Him for ever behind the veil and the cloud which bounds the sight of the living.

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Revelation is benediction. It is the expression of a concern, of a sympathy, of a love, which will not willingly let us die. Look thus at the Bible, regard thus the Inspiration which created it, regard thus the mysteries which it explains and the mysteries which it enshrines—it will alter your view of it. Call it to yourself the Book of grace and peace; call it the Epistle, from a far country, of One in whom, not for His good but for yours, you live and move and have your being, and who thus conveys to you, from out of sight, the assurance of His tenderness and of His love—it will become a message to you, and a voice, and a power; even as it is written, *The Word of the Lord was precious in those days*, just because *there was no open vision*.

But there is this of special interest in the text, that it is a benediction, in express terms, from the Holy Trinity.

That mighty aggregate and concentration of

all truth, which is embodied in the festival of this Sunday, and from which the following Sundays of half the year are contented to name themselves, is often spoken of, oftener thought of, as something cold and formal and (in a reproachful sense) dogmatical; something which man's ingenuity has added to the record, for the bewilderment of the submissive and the condemnation of the rational.

How, how untrue! If man has ever—and we will not quite deny it—made such a use as this of the blessed revelation of a Father and Saviour and Comforter, how far has he wandered from the source and spring of truth! Let us come back to-day from eager angry controversies about words and forms, human in their origin, recalling by their phraseology times of wrath and strife and doubting—let us come back to the Word that cannot lie! Let us hear what Inspiration says of the Trinity! Surely of this, if of anything, is the saying of this

day's Gospel true, *No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven.* Let us hear from His lips, or from lips touched by the coal from His altar, what 'he that would be saved must think of the Trinity.' And it is this: it is the voice of love and of benediction: *Grace be unto you, and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ.*

There is here not only a spirit of love, but a spirit of freedom. This is no *letter that killeth*; no formal, rigid, mechanical utterance, such as the orthodox man may tabulate from his bookshelves, and then count himself safe because his expression is accurate. It is very remarkable, that the lifegiving breath of Inspiration binds itself not even to an order. Creeds and Articles, gathering from Scripture those inferences which are to stereotype doctrine,

must be careful and even precise in arrangement as in definition. With God it is not so. His utterance, which is benediction, comes forth free and unfettered from the exhaustless fountain of wisdom. *Grace and peace*, here—mark, I say, the order—*from the Father, and from the seven Spirits, and from Jesus Christ*; as, in another like saying—mark, I pray you, again, the order—*The grace of our Lord, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Spirit*.

The Father, and the Spirit, and the Son—the Son, and the Father, and the Spirit—what matters form, when God speaks? what matters order, when the Three are One?

Thus was it while Christianity was young, and while the seamless coat was not yet rent by its own. It was the compensating grace of those times, when to be a Christian was to be a sufferer, that at least the Church was consciously one, as much in her faith as in her baptism. She could be free in speech, because

she knew herself to be sound in doctrine. She still *sat by the well*, and drank of the fountain. While *the word of God dwelt in her richly*, she needed not a theology of creeds any more than a liturgy of rubrics. She could still dispense with definition, and rather sit to listen at the Master's feet, than rise to write His doctrine into dogma. She could still, secure from misapprehension, give the rein to piety, and speak of ministries and sacraments in terms which later would have been superstitious. Still, in a sense, the Bridegroom was with her, and they were holidays of spirit, if fast-days of the flesh.

It was otherwise soon. The tradition of truth lost the dew of its birth. Philosophy began to speculate upon Scripture; and that free thought, which is truth, degenerated into that free thinking, which is error. It became necessary to define. Language was held, by this preacher, by this writer, and that, concerning

the Nature of God and the Incarnation of Christ, which could not be suffered to represent itself unchallenged as the faith of the Church. In self-defence the Church must speak ; speak by Councils, speak in Creeds. It is ignorance, ignorance of history as well as of man, to talk of a more systematic theology as either gratuitous in its introduction or superfluous in its retention. The several clauses of the Athanasian Creed are monuments of so many distinct errors ; not impossible, because they have been. It is the very existence of these definitions which allows us to call them superfluous. If they were not, we should want them. They mark the sites of so many volcanos, extinct only because they have exploded. It may be lawful to wish ourselves in an age prior to dogma ; but, being where we are, it is ingratitude to resent it. There are two questions, and but two, which a sound-hearted Churchman asks himself concerning

that particular Creed. The one affects its damnatory clauses—their old name is the true one—which are no part of its doctrine, and in the judgment of many disfigure it. The other affects its public recitation; which is not essential to its reverence, and in the judgment of many damages it. The document itself is a monument of the Church's, of the Gospel's, history: it marks a providential dealing: it records a necessity, lamentable yet imperious.

We turn from this brief mention of a subject which is on all lips to-day, to one altogether sweet and bright and wholesome; to the Revelation of the Holy Trinity as it is made from heaven itself; made in deepest love, made in Divinest benediction.

We have before us, in these words of St John the Divine—chosen, now first, as a special Lesson for Trinity Sunday—one of the most explicit, most instructive recognitions to be found in all Scripture, of the two, opposite yet

not conflicting, principles of our most holy Faith : the first, the Unity of the Deity ; the second, the existence in the one Deity of three Divine Persons. The very words check their own utterance. We are here amidst thoughts too high for us. Yet, when we find such a combination as this, *Grace be to you from God and Christ and the Spirit ;* or this, *The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom I will send unto you from the Father ;* or this, *Go ye, and teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost ;* we feel that either we must discard half the Bible or record this phenomenon—recognize it, use it, live by it—inasmuch as it is clearly a fundamental truth of that Revelation which discloses to us our God. But surely, my brethren, for this further reason also—that they who try it find it so unspeakably good and true ; find that, where the intellect fails to comprehend, the soul springs forth to embrace ;

find that here and here only is rest for life and for death—rest for the whole man and for the whole of being—*Grace be unto you, and peace, from the everlasting self-existent God ; and from the sevenfold Spirit before His throne ; and from Jesus Christ.*

It is the Benediction of the Holy Trinity which is here offered us. As such would we accept it, and we would also hand it on. We would attract you this day to the mystery from which it is named. We would ask you to put aside, if it be possible, all curious speculations on the one hand, all sceptical objections on the other, and to suffer the benediction, as it here breathes itself, in its inartificiality, in its living life-giving simplicity, to come into your hearts and to express itself in your lives.

You know how solemn is the blessing which a beloved father or mother can bestow on a son first leaving his home, or from a bed on which hangs already the shadow of approaching

death. How far would we travel, any of us, at what cost of toil and pain, not to miss such a blessing! Here, to-day, as we just sit or kneel in this solemn building, God Himself draws nigh and would bless. See that we *refuse not Him that speaketh*.

Listen. *Grace and peace*.

Our two wants. Some One to love us. Some One who changes not—who dies not—to whom we never die. And to love us freely—for that is *grace*. To love us in spite of us. To love the unlovely. To dwell with the rebellious; and, by so dwelling, to transfigure and to transform.

And *peace*. Just that which we have not: just that which the world cannot give: that knitting into one, of all the roving, erring, scattered parts of us—mind, heart, and soul; feeling, and faculty, and desire, and affection—so that all shall find rest and repose and satisfaction in one Object, worthy of

all, and regardful and receptive and responsive too.

Grace—and peace—from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come. Great repose is in the words. He who offers grace and peace fills all time and two eternities.

This little, care-worn, fleeting yet wearying being ; so small in one aspect, so vast in another ; in power nothing, yet in capacity of suffering immense—the Eternal offers to fill it. To take it within the compass of His own infinitude, and so to give it immortality of blessed life. *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*

To expand such a thought is to weaken it. Give it place, give it room, within.

And from the seven Spirits which are before His throne.

The Epistle has here interpreted the Lesson. There is an anticipation here of the imagery of

the 4th chapter. *There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.*

St John's soul was alight with God's Spirit. He was penetrated with this one thought—the diffusiveness. St John saw how full earth and heaven are of the Holy Ghost. He would have us see Him, feel Him, everywhere. In every faculty, in every affection, in every aspiration. In all the gifts of Creation, of Providence, of mind, of soul. In all the ministries which Christ has set in His Church, and in all the responsibilities which God has laid upon us in His world. Above all, in the wonderful operations of grace in the soul of the individual man. What a microcosm is one life! What a memory, what a history, what a biography, is bound up in these bodies! If the secrets of these hearts were revealed, what a light would be instantaneously cast upon St John's saying, *the seven Spirits!* He would have us see that

there is no multiplicity, no entanglement, no intricacy, of outward or of inward circumstance, which is too complex or too subtle for the operation of God's Spirit. Call Him in, he would say to us, all ye whose work is too heavy for you, or whose way is too ambiguous, or whose life is too troublous. Call Him in, he would say to us, if any of you have at this moment some fear or some doubt, some perplexity or some embarrassment, which you cannot cope with, which you are sinking under or fleeing from. *Grace and peace from the seven Spirits.* Ye ministers of the Word, who are sore let and hindered by your own infirmities; who know not how to preach your next Sermon, or which way to look for wisdom in guiding, in counselling, in converting, these souls that hang upon you for their oversight—ye men and women, whose work seems so secular that you know not how to throw upon it one gleam, one faintest ray, of the light

which shines where God is—ye sinful men, young and old, who have suffered world and flesh and devil to wrap you round with thick palpable folds of vice and ungodliness, till you cannot in your very dreams imagine yourselves set free—I offer you *grace and peace*, love and the sense of love, *from the seven Spirits that are before God's throne*: whatsoever you are, in nature, history, circumstance, here, in the benediction of the Spirit, is freedom, is strength, is everlasting life.

And from Jesus Christ. As the Divine Spirit is a Person, so the personal Christ is Divine. All is wonderful. What is not wonder, where God is?

Is it not well to be thus reminded—reminded by seeming contradictions, which yet Scripture, the Voice of God, has boldly hazarded—of the imperfection of language where God is the subject? Let us stand afar off with our logic and with our rhetoric—let us draw nigh, very nigh,

with our worship and with our adoration ; let us not expect to reconcile or to systematize here, but let us be careful to let no fragment, no crumb, of the holy feast drop from us through our haste or through our neglect or through our pride—and, so doing, we may be well assured of this, that, though we may see at present (as St Paul writes) in mirror and riddle, by dim reflection and in dark saying, yet that which we imperfectly see is true and substantial, and *they which shall be counted worthy to obtain that world* shall hereafter see it as it is.

Grace and peace from Jesus Christ. Stronger than a thousand texts in definition of doctrine, are these incidental testimonies to the Divinity of Jesus. Could any man, not meaning to be blasphemous, wish *grace and peace* from God and—a man? Brethren! for St John, for St Paul, for the Church of Saints and Martyrs, of Prophets and Apostles, the Divinity, the

Deity, of our Lord Jesus Christ was a first principle of truth—assumed in every line of their writing, attested by the last drop of their blood.

Grace and peace from Jesus Christ. If time permitted, we would have shown in what manner—itsself a Trinity—the benediction of the Eternal Son unfolds itself. *The faithful Witness—the firstfruit of Resurrection—the King of kings.* See Him in this threefold office—as the Prophet, Priest, and King. See Him (1) born to be a Witness; a Witness, He said, to the Truth; a Witness of things seen in heaven; a Witness of realities which rest, for time and eternity, upon His *Verily, verily*, and which have never yet failed, in life or in death, the soul that trusted them. A Witness—then, as the Greek says, a *Martyr* too; dying, as He lived, for the truth. See Him (2) the *firstborn from the dead*; declared by Resurrection to be the Son, and, as the Son, the High Priest of

God. See Him entering, as at this season, upon the exercise of the Priesthood; carrying the sacrificial blood into the Holy of Holies, and there presenting it, for individual Atone-ment, before the Mercy-seat of the Presence. See Him (3) enthroned and crowned, by Ascension, as God's King; reigning now over the kings of the earth—yea, though they know it not, or send embassies of remonstrance after Him. See the prophecy already in fulfilment, *Henceforth shall ye see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming—already coming—coming in perpetual premonition of the great Coming—in the clouds of heaven.*

Grace and peace from Him in this trinity of His Offices. Let Him teach you God's mysteries. Let Him intercede for you in God's presence. Let Him reign in your heart with God's power.

Grace and peace—from the Father—and from the Spirit—and from the Son. You may cavil—

nothing is so easy—at God's Revelation. It would not be Revelation if it were not wonderful. God begins not till man ends. That which reason can do—itsself God's gift—God lets it do. He enters not, with added grace, till His first grace, creation, is expended. Then He speaks. Speaks, because He has that to say which man, with all his searching, could not find out. Speaks, not to supersede, but to supplement, reason. Speaks, because sin has entered, and because evil, prevalent over the creature, owns its Conqueror only in the Creator. Monstrous then to complain that this which God says is not rational! If it were rational—if it belonged to reason, if it were within the ken of reason, God would not have said it. It is because in the disclosure of something lying out of the reach of reason God saw that there was health and life, blessing and immortality, for His blind and helpless and hopeless creation—therefore He reveals. Hides still from wise and prudent;

from sophist and caviller; from self-worshipper, and idolater of intellect: reveals only unto babes; to those, who, knowing their need, know also His alone sufficiency to supply it.

To these, whosoever they be in this Congregation, is the message of this Feast, the Benediction of the Holy and Blessed Trinity, this day sent. You will want it one day. You will want it, when earth is swept bare for you by one of God's winds from the wilderness. You will want it, when you are trying single-handed the tremendous battle with a deadly sin. You will want it, when you lie at last on a deathbed—when you have to rise from the long sleep to stand on that dread morning before the great white Throne. Then, then—God grant it be ere death comes—you will see the meaning of the Divine Trinity. You will see why there should be a Saviour, and why that Saviour must be Divine. You will see why there should be a Spirit, and why that Spirit

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must be a Person. God grant us that sight
now, while to see is to live!

TRINITY SUNDAY,
May 26, 1872.

XIV.

FIGHTING BEFORE RESTING.

He lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, there stood
a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand.
—JOSHUA v. 13.



OSHUA is to-day the Church's study. Not, now, the long monotonous record, heard for so many generations on this first Sunday after Trinity, of his campaign against the five kings and the seven, of the battle of Bethhoron and the sun standing still upon Gibeon. A view more comprehensive, more varied, more human in its interest, more Divine in its moral, is opened, by recent changes, before us. We look at the man—old already in years, young in strength and prowess; called at last from the second place

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in the foremost: called to that unprecedented task, the succession of Moses; called to transport Israel across Jordan, and to give them rest, to give them inheritance, by tribe and by household, in a land not theirs save by promise. We look at him thus—and we marvel at the mingled bravery and self-forgetfulness and authority and tenderness, which make his strange work possible to him. We see him, unlike Moses, like the first of the Prophets, faultless (so far as Scripture tells) in act and speech. We see him possessed and penetrated, through and through, with a sense of the Presence—bowing himself, in lowliest prostration, before Israel's Champion and Israel's King; and, in the strength of that one devotion, fearless, intrepid, inflexible, towards all else, towards hostile power and popular influence. We see him doing justly, and loving mercy, because walking humbly with his God. We see him, in the close, concentrating all his

energies upon one impressive appeal to the heart and soul of his country: an appeal grounded upon the unexampled experiences of that marvellous history, and rising with prophetic enthusiasm into a region of awe and apprehension in which he forecasts his people's future, and would guard them, while it is possible, against perils as yet undeveloped, in which the national fortunes are eventually to make shipwreck.

The mission of Joshua stands in marked contrast with that of his predecessor. At first sight, his is the higher office. He is to lead Israel into that land of promise from which the Lawgiver is debarred. The desert sojourn is ended—that period of ‘provocation,’ which had so clouded the lustre of the Exodus and of Sinai. Viewed by results, the career of Moses ended in failure. The desire of his life was denied him. To see and not enter was a doom and a disappointment. Not this the idea, the

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hope, the promise, with which he re-entered Egypt from Midian, or saw the sea return upon Pharaoh on the night to be much remembered. Like all God's mightiest workmen below, he left a ragged edge, and was overtaken by death ere his harvest was come.

It was not so with Joshua. He toiled for forty years in the brickfields of Egypt, and then there rose upon his life the bright light of hope and emancipation. He shared the trials and despondencies of the wilderness ; but it was as one who should outlive and obliterate them. Meanwhile he was the warrior, the general, of Israel ; the trusted friend and confidant of the noblest and wisest of men. With a fidelity sometimes betrayed into jealousy, he guarded his master's honour, and tasted that purest of joys, which is self-forgetfulness in loving. He attended him half way up the mountain where he was to meet in solitude a living God : he first met him on the descent, and shared the

bitter sorrow of the sin and the judgment. His soul took the impress, and caught the illumination. Education lasted for him through four-score and five years out of the hundred and ten: but it was an education, like all educations worthy of the name, not of servile mechanical copying, but of trusted action and progressive responsibility. When at last the parting came—that bitterest of all partings, with the guide of the youth and the exemplar of the manhood—he was ready to assume the vacant chieftainship, and to enter upon those eventful five-and-twenty years into which the ostensible work of his life was to be crowded: the work, first, of conquest; the work, secondly, of settlement; the work, last not least, of recognized presidency and pathetic farewell.

His work was success: the work of his master was failure. And yet there is an aspect in which we must invert them. How far more buoyant, if we analyze it, the feeling of the

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Exodus than the feeling of the Entrance! How infinitely more spirited the passage of the sea than the passage of the river! No song of the children of Israel celebrates the landing of the ark or the building of the altar in Gilgal. The scene upon which they enter is no scene of luxury or of gratulation. The first city in their onward way has scarcely fallen—fallen not by might nor by power, but by the outstretched arm of God—when there reveals itself a tragedy of guilt and judgment, a mysterious defeat and a pitiable execution. The victories of Bethhoron and Merom are signal and splendid: but their fruits are less than complete, and the possession of Canaan itself is neither entire nor absolute. The keen eye of the leader looks forth upon a less satisfying picture than that of Palestine from Pisgah. He has given Israel rest: but it is a rest troubled and broken. He has come, and seen, and conquered: yet the vanquished foe keeps his fortress and his fastness. The tone of

the latest utterances is dejected and dispirited. The work of the life is ended, but it will have to be done again, again, and yet again, by others. On the whole, as Moses is greater in all the earth than Joshua, so was the very failure of the one greater and more glorious and more indestructible than the other's triumph.

We enter to-day, my brethren, upon the year's unmarked, uneventful period. We have trodden the annual path of fast and feast, of Christmas and Epiphany, of Lent and Easter, of Ascension and Pentecost: for good or for evil, we have once again taken part in these celebrations. Whether the heart has slept or wakened, we have joined in the Church's prayers and songs; we have claimed a share, unchallenged, in the spiritual exercises of the faithful. They are ended now, for half a year, as regards their more inspiring and exciting reminiscences. We enter now upon a long and level way, reaching from summer to winter,

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from days of brightest sunshine to those of deepest shade and darkest chill. At this season, evidently not by chance, the Church meets us with thoughts of peculiar solemnity : bids us to think of the perils of a life of ease and abundance ; how it glides, naturally and of course, into a neglect of God and the brethren, into a profitless waiting for surprises and compulsions of grace, which come not, or come in vain, to those who, having Moses and the Prophets, having Christ and the Apostles, will not hear them : bids us to remember how Israel, led safely into his rest, yet missed his blessing ; found Canaan itself no land of promise, because he failed to occupy and to possess it ; failed to make it his own by brave effort and thorough devotion, and was contented to dwell all his days in the midst of blessings unblest and enemies surviving to tempt.

It is this which the Joshua period teaches : the danger of precipitating rest ; of refusing to

make it restful by making it safe; of reposing prematurely upon privilege and blessing, instead of taking possession of it, each family, each man, for himself, by hard fighting and indomitable resolution.

Joshua stands by Jericho: Jordan safely crossed—the hope of years realized—fear fallen upon the Canaanites—the reproach of Egypt rolled away by the sharp knives of Gilgal—the passover duly kept—the manna of the desert exchanged at last for the parched corn of a land inhabited. Might it not be a moment of unmingled complacency? Might not the old warrior repose safely for an hour upon an enterprise assured by promise and splendidly inaugurated? In the knowledge of a Divine Leader and an Omnipotent Presence, would it be strange, would it be wrong, to feel the life's work already as good as done, and to relax something of the long tension of the last forty or five and forty years?

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He lifts up his eyes, and there meets him a spectacle corrective of such dreamings : *a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand.* 'Fighting before resting' is the legend of the vision : and when Joshua accosts the Form with the question, *Art thou for us, or for our adversaries* — art thou Friend or Foe ? the answer is as though he would say, Not this, or that, absolutely ; Friend of the fighting man, Foe of the fleeing ; *Captain of the host of the Lord*, and therefore on the side of those, and those only, who are willing to fight under His banner against His enemies and theirs.

Joshua fell on his face to the earth and did worship ; and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant ? And the only present answer—but containing in itself, rightly read, an answer of universal direction—is a demand of reverence and of adoration. *The captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot ; for the place*

whereon thou standest is holy. The same lesson which Moses was taught, when he was to be first charged with God's commission; the same lesson which every one of God's servants in each successive age of the Church's long history must learn before he can rightly put his hand to God's work; the lesson of revelation and realization of God, of a greatness stooping to communicate, and a littleness elevated by the listening. *Loose thy shoe from off thy foot . . . And Joshua did so.*

The old allegory has taught us to make Jordan death, and Canaan heaven. Yet in reality warfare, not rest, lay for Israel beyond Jordan. Not heaven, but earth, Christian earth, is the true antitype of the land of promise.

In various ways men have misread this. But all in the direction of a premature repose.

Some have thought that the first troubles and pangs of a repentance so sweeping that it

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was their conversion, must surely be followed, followed instantly, by a rest and a peace to be no more broken. If they have not found it so, they have much reproached themselves, and much misgiven. And preachers of the Gospel have not been wanting, who would make the Christian Canaan a land literally of repose. They have so painted the blessedness of justification, as to leave out of sight the gradualness, the difficulty, the precariousness, of sanctification. They have said, Salvation lies in the belief of itself: saving faith is faith in the individual acceptance: to doubt this, to delay the assurance of it, is what Scripture means by unbelief. Once cross the Jordan, by appropriating to yourself the atoning work of Christ, and afterwards you have but to enjoy—but to maintain that faith in the Atonement—and you are safe for time, safe for eternity. When a man has remonstrated against this doctrine; has said, for

example, I doubt not the Saviour's power, I doubt not the Saviour's will, but I doubt very much the depth of my repentance; or, I find myself still the prey of old sins and old inconsistencies, and, while this is so, I cannot, I feel that I ought not, merely to enjoy; he has been called legal, self-righteous, certainly unbelieving; and another, who had no such scruples, but whose life was far less watchful, far less self-denying, far less charitable, has been flattered by the praise of a stronger faith, and by the promise of a higher heaven.

Others have gone yet further in the same error. They have mistaken the passage of the Jordan for the conquest of the Canaanite. They have settled down contentedly among their enemies. The world, the flesh, and the devil, have but shut themselves up for a day or an hour in their strongholds; and lo, the child of promise thought them extirpated, and never buckled on his armour to fight for his allot-

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ment. How true the parable in such cases—the parable which tells of Israel suffering the old inhabitants, and finding them *scourges in their sides and thorns in their eyes!* Even such, to us, are those old sins, which a false Gospel taught us to disregard, and a bitter experience compels us to quake before. Dearly bought are those first few days of unreal security, which we were bidden to regard as the perfection of discipleship. The land into which faith admits us is a land not all at once of repose. It is an exceeding good land, full of grace and comfort and blessing: but it has still to be fought for, with foes not of flesh and blood. Every honest combat with a real sin is worth days and years of a false, because premature, peace. Enough if we know Jesus Christ as able, as willing, to save to the uttermost; and earnestly commit to Him the charge of our souls and the management of our warfare. How dreadful, to awake from the

dream of conversion to the sober certainty of an unchanged life! How dreadful, to have been deluded by a name, and to find the reality that which cannot see God! It was not that we thought Christ strong when He was weak, or merciful when He was extreme to judge: it was, that we reposed upon a strength which we ought to have used, and dreamed of a mercy which we ought to have acted upon.

He lifted up his eyes, and looked; and behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand.

It was an emblem of the time now present. These are our fighting days, whosoever we be. If any man finds the Christian life easy, we know by that sign that he knows it not.

(1) It is not easy to believe. True faith—the faith by which saints live and die—experiences a thousand doubtings ere it establishes itself for eternity. If these doubtings are let alone, they will be traps for the living man,

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and snares for the dying. We must not dwell among these foes. We must not count the land ours, while they are only shut up. They must be challenged and faced and slain. It can be done—but it will not do itself. Take note of your difficulties; register them, bring them to book: half of them will vanish in the stating, the other half must be encountered with the sword of the Spirit. Examination, counsel, thought, reading, reflection, prayer, will not only rout, they will exterminate, the foe. Five years hence you will marvel that you ever doubted. It is otherwise if you suffer doubt; if you ignore, if you stifle, if you merely banish it. Then it will take to itself seven other doubts, and harass your age or torture your death-bed. Remember the Captain of the Lord's host, and pray Him to fight for you against the enemy.

Meanwhile we will jealously guard each spot of land already won, and extend ourselves day

by day into another spot and another beyond it. That which we are assured of, if it be but the holiness of God, if it be but the sinlessness of Jesus Christ, if it be but the sinfulness of sin, if it be but the solemnity of death, if it be but the need of a new birth of water and fire, of sanctification and the Spirit, if it be but the need of a pure heart such as may hereafter see God—how much more, if it be a revelation, nearer and more personal, of the love of God, of His will that we should be saved, of His unspeakable gift of forgiveness and the Holy Ghost through faith in a Son delivered for our offences, raised for our justification—let us hold it fast, have it for our weapon, have it for our comfort, have it for our life. By little and little we shall make our own much which is now nominal to us and unreal. We shall be ever occupying, till the whole land is ours.

(2) If faith is not easy, neither is holiness. Depend upon it, every man has to fight for it.

If not thus, then thus. If not with gross open sins, sins which *go before unto judgment*, then with subtler, more secret faults; faults of temper and speech, faults of motive and affection, vanities, levities, uncharitablenesses, worldlinesses; sloth of life and of worship, aversion to duty, ungodliness of spirit. These things vary in kind, they scarcely differ in amount, in one of us and another. The man who lets himself alone will never be holy. His sins may hide themselves, may convey themselves away, may put on new forms, may leave him often free. For weeks or for years he may lead a quiet life for them, may be conscious of no attack, may even fancy himself to have overcome: none the less are the old occupants alive and observant; they are but beguiling him into a carnal security, most opposite to a safe possession, most significant of sorrows, of perils, of disappointments to come. This is the history, doubtless, as God sees it, of many a life fair in its promise,

nugatory in its performance. There has been no thorough grappling with the Amorites or with the Anakim. One period of life has been gone through, another is entered upon: there is a change of tendencies, a change of tempters—for each period has its own: but inasmuch as the former set were never encountered, the later set are sure of their triumph. In their dens and their lurking-places, waiting for nightfall, are the sins and the offences which we would not exterminate. Forth they steal, in some hour of darkness, some unguarded day of sloth or excitement—themselves in altered garb or with disguised face—to take an advantage once again which they ever found sufficient, successful, before. This is the misery, this the instability, this the ruin, of the man who crossed Jordan to rest, and never lifted up his eyes to see the drawn sword in the hand of his Captain.

Take to yourselves, beloved brethren, the

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weapons which God has given you. This is the very use of His means of grace. Learn to look upon these as your friends. Think of the blessed Gospel, the Word of grace and peace, the promise of pardon, the offer of the Spirit as sent to you expressly for the conquest of your Canaan. Grasp it, and you are brave : wield it, and you are victorious. It tells you of One who bought heaven for you with His blood, and who ever lives to be your Life. Think of prayer, public prayer and private, as the wonderful, the unspeakable privilege of God's children. Come to it with large expectations. Help the prayer of others by your own. Join us here, if it may be so, in daily devotion. Where is the day which would be shortened by such worship? Some, surely, of the younger men, if not of the elders, of these two Societies, might redeem, by a small sacrifice, one half-hour, each day, for this happy, this helpful Service. Turn in hither, on your

way to your work; and bless that work itself by prayer and self-consecration. Regard yourself as fighting for your allotment in God's kingdom; and see that you lose it not. When once that thought is formed in you, all will take its colour. God has brought you over Jordan: but God has not, for it would have been a fatal cruelty, dispensed in your case with the necessity of facing the foe. Take the measure of your difficulties and of your dangers—and then be strong and very courageous.

One weapon all can use if they will. It is the blessed Sacrament here week after week offered you. That Sacrament—it is scarcely a play upon words to call it the *Sacramentum*, the soldier's oath, of a Militant Church—is specially designed to assist us in possessing our Canaan. There, if anywhere—there, at that Table, kneeling with hearts opened consciously and of purpose before our God—we see our Captain standing before us, with sword drawn

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for our salvation. And when we ask Him, *Art Thou, Lord, for us or for our adversaries?* He will say to us, Whosoever will, let him follow me; follow me to victory here, follow me into rest hereafter!

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,
June 2, 1872.

XV.

INDIVIDUALITY AND INDEPENDENCE OF GRACE.

He rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water. . . . It was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.—JUDGES vi. 38, 40.

 IDEON has asked for a sign. For some time he has been in communication with a world not of flesh and blood. Living in a dark age—dark with anarchy and idolatry and hostile invasion—he has been singled out, and made to know it, as the deliverer of Israel. One daring act, the desecration and demolition of the altar of Baal, has already proved his courage and determination. Now the Spirit of God has come upon him—‘clothed’ him is the graphic figure of the

original; clan and tribe are already summoned by his trumpet, and all is prepared for a decisive rising against the occupying host of Midian. On the very eve of the expedition, Gideon asks yet one sign more. He himself prescribes the form of it. He will put a fleece of wool in the threshing-floor, and he asks that it alone may be wet with dew, the earth being dry around it. Afterwards he inverts the request. *Let it be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.* He asks reverently, almost timidly, as fearing displeasure for the presumption; but no such reproof meets him: as he says, so is it. In the one case he rises early, and wrings out of the fleece a bowl-full of water. In the other, it is dry upon the fleece only, and there is dew on all the ground. Then follows instantly the wonderful story of the campaign of liberation. By two successive tests he reduces to three hundred his army of thirty and two thousand. First,

whosoever is fearful is bidden to depart from Mount Gilead. Then, by the test of the mode of drinking, he discriminates between the rash and the self-controlled. Even now the victory is to be won not by sword or spear. The romantic incident of the night-visit to the enemy's camp emboldens him to try the effect of panic. Lamps hidden within earthen vessels till they suddenly flash upon the sleeping host, amid the sounding of three hundred trumpets, and the war-cry of *The sword of the Lord and of Gideon* — such is the stratagem which he tries, and the result justifies it. Every man's sword is set against his fellow throughout all the host of Midian; and Gideon and his three hundred, after a day of glorious victory, at last reach the Jordan, *faint yet pursuing*.

The courage of the leader is scarcely more signal than his humility and disinterestedness. He calms the anger of a jealous and powerful tribe by the graceful self-abnegation of the

half-proverbial reply, *What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?* When the gratitude of Israel says to him, *Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son*, his answer is ready and final; *I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you. He went and dwelt in his own house.* A national repose of forty years followed his victory. He died in a good old age, and was buried in his father's sepulchre, in the place which had been the home of his youth. Not unsullied, in one respect, by the prevalent faults of his age, his character shines on the whole, both positively and by contrast, as that of a virtuous and religious patriot; and he has his place, by name, in the record of those men of old time who *obtained a good report through faith; who through faith wrought righteousness, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in*

fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

For indeed, my brethren, it is no fancy which sees in these old heroes of Israel that 'one touch' of God's Spirit which makes God's saints of all time kin. The sight of the Invisible One, the consciousness of His Presence and His Providence, the absolute surrender of body and spirit to His work and His purpose; this is characteristic of all of them, and this, this is faith. Mixed characters, ambiguous characters, viewed in the full light of evangelical day, you may call them if you will—where, save in theory, do you find perfect characters now? Would the scene presented in the Bible be the scene of life which we look upon, if the characters were not mingled, even to ambiguity, of good and evil? Who told us that we were to look for perfection in a saint below? God's Word written is the mirror of life. In large part it teaches by example. To do this, its examples must be life-like; men of flesh and

blood, men of passion and action, men of principle and infirmity, tempted like as we are, and, like as we are, fallen. When we complain of this, make a difficulty of it, or a cavil, we err in two ways: we misinterpret Scripture, and we misinterpret grace. Scripture sets before us characters in formation, struggling (it may be) out of darkness into light, gradually shaping themselves, under discipline, under an education life-long at least, for the immortality where God is; not yet absolutely good, any one of them, and, in the Old Testament, not yet enlightened perfectly as to good and evil. We must leave something for the Gospel. We must allow Jesus Christ, if He is our Lord, to have introduced something which men knew not before, and which, not knowing, they could not practise, even of morality, much more of holiness. He himself recognized this principle when He said, *Moses for the hardness of your hearts wrote you this precept.* There is a

progress in all Education, even in the Divine. There are in God's system, St Paul tells us so, *rudiments of the world*, as well as *a dispensation of the fulness of times*. *Whoso readeth, let him understand*; understand the place and date of God's saints, and the degree of enlightenment there vouchsafed to them. Understand also the nature of Divine grace: how it comes, not to transfigure, but to transform; not to lift a man out of his age or out of his generation, but to make him faithful, according to his opportunity, in it; not to take him out of the world, not to overlay him with a sudden, a transcendental, a miraculous perfectness, but to kindle within him that lamp of divine illumination which shall shine more and more unto a perfect day.

When then you find in these old books of the Bible praises of virtues which you count irregular or unevangelical; as when, for instance, to-day you hear an inspired song declaring Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, blessed

for an act of beguilement and bloodshed which you feel instinctively that Christ your Master would disapprove ; do Him honour, do Him justice, in the remembrance that the morality of His Gospel was, in truth and simplicity, new to the world ; that the dogma, *Love your enemies*, was once, *Love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy* : learn that what God requires of us all is that we act earnestly and devotedly up to our light, according to our conscience ; that He condemns not any man for not having the light, nor yet justifies any man for the possession of a light which he will not walk by.

We rejoice, brethren, in those recent changes of our Sunday Service, which bring to the light portions of God's Word hidden away aforetime at least from our congregations. From one of these chapters my text is chosen to-day. It comes from a book of Holy Scripture, too familiar once in its letter to fanatical abusers, but having a use, all its own, for those who will

study it in its spirit ; not to draw from it a few fragments of sentiment, torn from the context, and giving a large handle to the scoffer by a treatment felt to be irrelevant, but to find in it the likeness of a time in which every man does that which is right in his own eyes ; recognizes no law, in Church or State, but that of the self-will and the self-pleasing ; acknowledges no corporate life and no mutual responsibility ; asks contemptuously, *Am I my brother's keeper ?* and, *Who is lord over me*, so long as I break into no man's house, and ask no man to feed or clothe me without my labour ? In such an age the Book of Judges starts again into vitality. And if I set before you to-day a verse which speaks rather of the individual than of the community, it is in the confidence that only through the individual can the community catch God's fire ; that, when God means blessing to a Church, He first makes one of that Church's units live unto Him.

Gideon prays here for a sign, and God gives it.

Some interpreters see in that sign a type of natural character. The fleece is wet when all around is dry : even such was Gideon's coolness when all surrounding tempers were hot. The fleece is dry when all around it is moisture: such was Gideon's zeal when all surrounding spirits were languid.

I would read the signs somewhat differently to-day.

Gideon's anxiety was to be assured that it could possibly be true that God had chosen him, an insignificant inmate of an insignificant house, to be the champion and liberator of his country. The point then on which he craved satisfaction was surely the individuality, the distinctiveness, of God's grace. If God is pleased, by this sign, to show him that He distinguishes, that He selects, that He marks out a particular thing, or a particular person, for a purpose as to which all other things, all other

persons, are passed by and let alone; that shall decide. If this fleece of wool, which I place here to-night, and then fall on sleep, is in the morning wet with dew, and there is no dew around on the face of the floor or of the ground; if this same fleece, the next night, is on the same spot dry when there is a heavy dew all around it; then I shall perceive that God has discriminated me, among the many thousands of Israel, to be His instrument of help and emancipation to an oppressed and down-trodden people.

The use I would make of it, brethren, is just this—the individuality and the independence of grace.

1. The place of the individual in God's Church is of itself a mystery and a science. It may be misstated both ways. We are speaking now of the higher life. The life of this life has its own difficulties, in this aspect as in others: we pass it by to-day. We speak of the soul's life. It also has an individual and a corporate

meaning. Some men make the one of these, and some men make the other, the whole of the life. There are those who make religion begin and end with the man. His conviction, his conversion, his sanctification, his direction, his peace, his growth—this is everything. To gather one here and one there into that kingdom of God which is altogether secret and spiritual—this is the office of preaching, this of ministering, this of all Christian influence, contact, and converse. The result of all this—estimated in large part by comfort, by serenity of mind and satisfaction in devotion—is the success of the Gospel work in the midst of a world, and even of a Church, which must still *lie in the wicked one*.

Others, shocked by the conclusion, have vehemently urged the converse view. Perish the individual—let the community be all in all. Let the man lose himself in the Church. Let him forget his own safety, his own comfort, his

own race, his own end, in the thought of the one body. The more he realizes the corporate life and tramples under-foot the individual, the more true, the more real, will be his fulfilment of duty. To stop himself, at every other step, with the question, What am I, and what is my state as God sees it? is to obtrude self into a region utterly foreign to it. Let him do his work, let him occupy his place, in the mighty universal fabric, and lose as much as possible all self-questioning and self-consciousness. Let him say his prayers in Church, let him be frequent in holy Communion, let him live a good life—and all must be well; or, if not well, then he must bow to God's judgment, and forget himself still in the common weal and woe.

On both sides there is a truth and there is an error. They are not so wide apart as they seem. There is a danger of selfishness in religion. There is a danger of morbidness, of

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self-suspicion—of indolence, in consequence, and irresolution—in the spiritual life. There is a mood and temper of soul, for which the Church is the cure, and solitude the poison. Many men never set out in earnest in the soul's life, because they are waiting for signs which God sees to be bad for them. Let them seize the mighty fact, the redemption of the world, the propitiation for all its sins; and on the strength of that fact let them trust God and work for Him. If they cannot find peace, let them dispense with it. If they cannot pray at home, let them pray in Church. If they cannot feel themselves to be forgiven, let them bring their unbelief with them, and so come. Meanwhile let them cast themselves upon the great mercy, and wait for the little. Let them say, I am Thine by creation, Thine by redemption, Thine by sacrament and means of grace—O save me! work of Thine own hands in all these, forsake me not!

On the other hand, though we may prescribe this as medicine for a disease, we cannot recommend it as food for health. We do not believe that this is God's common order. We see a force in Gideon's prayer, which such doctrine would ignore. He says, Let it be dry all round, only let this fleece be wet! Let it be damp all round, only let this fleece be dry! So shall I know that Thou hast sent me: so shall I know—we translate his words—that Thou dealest with me; that I am Thine!

All God's great works below, all the lives of God's eminent saints below, have had this beginning. They could not shine without the kindling, and they could not run without the sending. That language of contempt for the individual, I know it may be the language of humility, but is it not sometimes the language of indolence; the language of one who fears or would save trouble; the language of one who will not enter into deep self-questioning, lest

it should either stimulate doubt or enforce change? Brethren, let us go direct to God with our spiritual yearnings and questionings. It is there, in the wilderness, in the mount, with Him alone, that we learn the secret of life and the secret of eternity. It is from such solitary communings that we return into the life and into the converse of this world, with the heart burning and the face glistening, to do the Church's work and to stimulate the Church's worship. Faith is the sight of the Invisible, and communion is the communication of that sight to other men.

I know we must not set laws for God, nor limit the Holy One. Gideon himself said, *Let not Thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once—Let me prove, I pray Thee, but this once with the fleece*: and more cause have we for this hesitance. Yet I doubt whether without this sign we are fit for great work. A man can scarcely go about his day's

duty, a man cannot possibly compass a life's work, without knowing what he is to God, and what God is to him. Perhaps he ought to know. Perhaps—which is truer—he might know. Yes, if he felt the pressure of the need, he would no doubt ask like Gideon, and like Gideon receive. But great work is not for every man; and we think to do the little work without God's sign. There is no voice to say to us, *Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high*. And so we start without it; start, to be many times baffled and driven back for the want of it; perhaps to make life itself a failure, and to hear God say of us, as of many a would-be prophet of old, *I sent him not—yet he ran*.

2. The individuality runs on into the independence of grace.

How beautiful the figure! *He shall come down, the Saviour, by the Spirit, like the rain into a fleece of wool, even as the drops that water the*

earth. The whole being shall drink in, shall absorb, the genial moisture; shall be penetrated, pervaded, saturated with it; so that, when it is pressed, 'thrust together' by the contact of men, there shall come out from it *a bowl full of water.* Such is the grace of God in man's soul. Such is the individuality, such is the independence, of that gift of Pentecost, which lives on, which is renewed day by day, in them that believe. It is the possession of the man. It is his own. It is not that 'alien' thing, as our Lord calls the mammon of this world, which is at once so accidental and so fugitive and (at best) so external that, even while I have it, it is 'another's.' The grace of God is a man's own. He can *carry it away with him when he dieth.* He shall awake with it in God's presence, and be satisfied. All around may be damp and dank, and dull and miry—his soul is still bright and buoyant. All around may be arid and parched and athirst—

his soul is still like a watered garden, the dew of the new birth still upon it, beautiful, and fresh, and fertilizing. Israel might be now languid and irresponsible, like the ground damped with excessive moisture; now hot, and vehement, and impetuous, like the ground baked with eastern sunshine: Gideon is at once brave and calm, at once enterprising and prudent; because the Spirit of God has enveloped him, and he is never alone, whose Father is with him.

Even such, brethren, in our day is the independence of grace. Other men take their opinions, form their judgments, derive their influences, draw their inspirations, from earth and earth's sons; dry if the ground is dry, wet if the ground is wet; wise with the wise, froward with the froward; *all things to all men*, not in Paul's sense; promising, professing, worshipping to-day, because Christian people surround them—to-morrow, breaking

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their vows, or following the multitude to do evil. There is no safeguard for any man but this one—individual grace, individual independence. Have God in you, and you are one; one all through and always: not, like Ephraim, *the cake not turned*; burnt on this side, sodden on that; a thing of patches and pieces, fit neither for table nor dunghill, because there is no unity, and no consistency, and no courage. Whosoever is beside you, let the dew be within; and men shall take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus. The voice of Christ, heard in the soul, *wakens you morning by morning* to the life hidden above: the hidden reveals itself in the visible, and earth shines with the reflection of heaven.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,
June 9, 1872.

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